



Episode 25: Come Home to Yourself

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 25.

It was a Wednesday in the middle of the week, a time when all the regular kinds of things happen - the washing, the waiting, the keeping of routines in home and life. But on this Wednesday last week, in the middle of February, we were brought to our knees when we heard the news of seventeen people who died in a high school shooting on Valentine's Day. It was also the first day of Lent.

We profess to believe God is good, and on some days we may *actually* believe it.

Once a week, for 15 minutes or so, we work to push back the walls that sometimes seem to be closing in. Here is where we make space and create room. Here is where we remember to remember because there are things we say we believe and then there are things we actually believe.

Dallas Willard speaks to that gap, says we always live what we believe, we just don't always live what we *profess* to believe.

So, this is a podcast where we learn to practice closing that gap where we pause before moving into our next thing and consider if it's the right one for us, for now. During this month, we're loosely talking about our next right thing in relationships. I'll just be honest coming out of this past week, I'm feeling vulnerable and tender on the inside. Over the last few days especially, I've journeyed into some time of reflection. I haven't decided yet if that's healthy or if it's a coping mechanism to protect against the world, but for better or worse, that's what you've got today. Since I'm your podcast host for the next few minutes, I'll be taking you with me. You're welcome and I'm sorry.

As I said before during this month we're talking about relationships, I realize too often the relational interaction we engage in the most is also the one that is most often ignored. It's the relationship we have with ourself.

So here we are again, discerning our next steps and our right-nows in the midst of *now whats?* and the *why did this happen? Again?* When life becomes unpredictable and unsure, it's easy to scatter apart in panic, to come undone, to be spread too thin, to forget who and where we are.

This is good for exactly no one. Change is not affected in the world by people who are flailing apart.

God always wants us to know it's not too late to come on back - to be gathered back to center again.

So what if your next right step is to settle in right where you are and come on back home to yourself?

Sound strange?

Consider this, the only person you're guaranteed to be with every day of your life is you. It doesn't get much more home than that. So maybe it's time to make some peace.

The first house I remember living in when I was little was our white house with the gravel drive on Gladstone Avenue in Indiana. Missy and Shelly were sisters who lived with their mom on one side of us and I thought they were rich or lucky because they had a basement, a sandbox, *and* cable TV. On the other side of our house was where red-headed Michelle lived. She seemed to never outgrow her baby teeth and always smelled like ketchup. A couple doors down from her was a house set back from the street where Mr. Huntington lived.

Now what I'm about to tell you may or may not have happened exactly this way but I can tell you it doesn't actually matter because no matter what, it's true. I was tempted to call my

sister actually and ask her the details to confirm some things but decided against it because what I've learned is stories can be true even if they never happen.

Our neighbor Mr. Huntington was tall, skinny, and reminded me of a skeleton. I don't know if that was because of his looks or because his last name kind of rhymed with skeleton or because he was just kind of scary to me. But all through elementary school our bus stop was at the end of his driveway and I always felt a little unsettled about that, like we were going to get in trouble for standing on his property. I don't know why I thought that although now that I think of it, I vaguely remember his windows being covered with No Trespassing signs. I can't say for sure, but standing on his driveway definitely felt like a violation of that orange and black request.

It was always a relief when bus 25 came around the corner to pick us up for school, a relief to step off the forbidden property and into the warm, loud interior of our school bus.

I can still see his house from my green pleather bus seat, a house that seemed to have eyes always looking out, furrowed brow, warning. It was hard enough standing at the edge of his driveway. I can't even imagine walking up to his door.

And yet, in many ways, I've had a lot of experience in walking up to the door of a house where I feel unwanted and unwelcome because for years this is what I did to myself. I stood at the edge of the driveway of my own soul, unaware of the life that wanted to be lived on the other side of the door.

Coming home to yourself is not always an easy thing to do.

If you arrive at a house and the hostess stands on the porch shouting criticisms, judgments, and sarcasms at you, guess what you won't want to do? Walk through the door.

You will turn your back on that house every time and vow never to return.

So what if we stopped standing on our own front porch and bullying ourselves? What if we decided instead, to be a gracious hostess to ourselves at the threshold of our own soul?

We don't go home when home is unsafe. So maybe your next right thing today is to recognize all the ways you've become your own enemy, all the ways you've put no trespassing signs on your own soul windows, all the ways you've become your own suspicious, furrow-browed neighbor.

Today, in these few minutes I want to offer two exercises that may help you come back home to yourself again.

First, think back to a time in your life when you felt most like you.

When I sat down to make my own list, I came up with 15 things right off the top of my head. Looking over this list delights me. One of the things on that list? Creating this podcast. It's actually true. Sharing these words with you every week, I feel like this is right, not just a melody but a harmony too. Like something is well with my soul deep inside.

Now, I can't say if that will always be true. But I can say it's true for now and I think that's important. Especially as we consider our next right step. When was a time when I felt most like me?

What about you?

Can you make a list of times in your life when you felt most like you?

Where were you?

What were you doing?

Who were you with? And maybe it's also important to consider, Who were you not with?

Here's another assignment for you, especially if that last one gave you a little bit of trouble.

Think back to words that someone spoke to you that when they said them, you felt fully seen and fully known to the extent that you could say along with them "There I am."

Don't confuse this one with just positive affirmation. I mean, it could be that for sure, but just because it was positive doesn't mean it felt like you. If you were told when you were younger how responsible and dependable you were as a child, that's a really positive thing and that may have been nice for you to hear but it could have also felt more like an expectation to live up to rather than a truth for you to grow into.

In contrast, I had an English teacher in high school, Mrs. Smith, tell me I was a very good writer. When she said it, it didn't feel like something I had to try to prove, it felt right though it would take decades before I grew into it.

On the other hand, I also had a teacher when I finished up college tell me I should get my Masters Degree in Deaf Education because she knew I would be good at it, and though I was flattered, it just didn't ring true. It just didn't feel quite like home to me.

In the summer of 2016, I sat with a group of writers tucked into a hillside in Tuscany and as the evening crept into night, my friend Tsh said she appreciated my friendship and when we related, she felt pastored by me. Pastored. She used that word. When she said it, something caught within me, a light both foreign and familiar and the tears stung and the light grew and I knew she spoke something true.

I'm still growing into that shepherding role and I have a lot to learn but when she spoke those words that night she colored something in for me, and it was well with my soul.

As my friend and teacher, Fil Anderson says, "It's a wild and wonderful thing to bump into someone and realize it's you."

What does it mean for you to come on home to yourself?

I can't say, specifically but I can say when you're close, you'll know it.

It will sound soft and gentle.

It will feel safe and settled.

You won't feel like you have something to prove.

It will be kind and open and free.

It may be something that you'll feel invited to grow into, that will require a bit of a journey. But it's one you'll be glad to take.

Maybe it will begin as you try something new.

Five years ago, I walked into my first yoga class, spread out my new mat on the floor of the youth room in a church nearby. It was a beginners class and it felt just right. I went once a week for eight months, began to learn the poses and how to breathe again, or, in some ways, maybe how to breathe for real for the first time.

A little less than a year into it, I moved on to a new class, this one met twice a week instead of once.

This new class was difficult for me not only physically but in other ways as well. These people were so *fit*. And *strong*. And *able*.

At the time I didn't know a lot about yoga, but I did know the importance of keeping your focus on your own mat, your own body, your own space and not someone else's. This is where most of my effort was focused, especially at first.

It hit on one of my own life-long struggles which is comparing myself to see where I fall on the continuum of progress. I have an inner compulsion to measure up or maybe not even up, just to *measure*. This measuring malady tends to make things complicated, clouding my focus, confusing my intention, and bringing discouragement.

Coming home to yourself will be different for all of us. But as we do it, we would do well to keep our eyes on our own mat.

So what are the times when you felt most like you?

When have words been spoken that have affirmed this in your own life?

If you have trouble coming up with some of those words, you have a God who fills in the gaps, always. In His presence is where you will find yourself. And in the presence of your true self is where you will finally see God.

Maybe it would be helpful for you to join with me in a prayer of remembrance to a God who doesn't just give us a home but who is our home.

Father, you are not bound by time or place or gravity, You move within me and I move within You.

You go ahead of me into an unknown future.

You walk toward me with love in Your eyes.

You stand beside me when I find myself in unsure places.

You sit next to me in silence and in joy.

You watch behind me to protect my mind from regret.

You live within me and lead from a quiet place.

When You speak with gentleness, may I not ignore You.

When You direct with nudges, may I move with ease.

When You declare Your love for me, may I refuse to squirm away.

When you offer good gifts, may I receive them with gratitude.

When You delay the answers, may I wait with hope.

I resist the urge to sprint ahead in hurry or lag behind in fear.

Let me keep company with You at a walking pace, moving forward together one step at a time as we learn to find home in one another.

You are for me. You are with me. *You are within me.*

Thanks for listening to Episode 25 of The Next Right Thing.

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As you consider what it means for you to make peace on the inside, some final, familiar words from Psalm 139

*O Lord, You have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You understand my thought from afar.
You scrutinize my path and my lying down,
And are intimately acquainted with all my ways.*

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