



Episode 57: Don't Dread Your Weird Life

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 57.

This is a place for anyone struggling with decision fatigue of any kind and for any reason whether you are chronically hesitant, prone to indecision, or if you simply have a thousand tiny things on your mind right now, clamoring for your attention.

While we won't be able to tackle all of those things today, my hope for you is by the end of this episode, you will have one clear next right step, a simple action you can take before the sun goes down tonight.

In fact, I'd love to hear how that turns out for you so be sure to listen until the end where I'll give you a hashtag so you can share your results. Curious?

Listen in.

Boarding the plane after a long week away from home, I counted the rows and saw a woman sitting in the aisle seat of my row. When I got closer I nodded my head to her to let her know I had the window seat. and as I approached and she quickly leaned down to gather her things and swing her legs into the aisle so I could get by her.

But what she pulled into her lap wasn't a bag like I expected, instead it was a large, oddly shaped crock-pot type machine, wrapped in a clear plastic bag, wound with a plug.

As I settled into the window seat, she placed the machine back beneath her feet with a huff, too large to fit under the seat in front of her. She looked at me and said, “My mom wants me to bring it to her,” as if that was all the explaining necessary.

I asked where she was headed.

“Brazil,” was all she said. And immediately, we both burst into fits of laughter.

It’s ridiculous, her carrying this awkward, heavy machine all the way to Brazil. I imagined the conversation that must have happened weeks ago.

Oh and honey, when you come, bring that giant cooking machine with you, would you?

Of course, she would say this in Portuguese, with an accent and much more lovely than that, but my southern version will have to do for this episode.

Life is so weird. This is humanity. In our minds, travel is one carry on, one smaller item, both to fit in 2 small rectangles of settled expectation. We start at point A and expect to arrive at B sooner or later. That’s how life goes for normal people, that’s how life should go for us.

And maybe, eventually, we do get to the place we intend to get to, but first, we have to go through H, I, J, K, a cul-de-sac, a freeway, and a stop at the mechanic all while wearing a clown nose and carrying a puppy.

The temptation is to believe that everyone else is doing it right and well I’m somehow, ridiculous. Why do all things go crazy for me?

But real life isn’t linear, that’s what I’m saying. And normal hardly ever happens.

I regret to admit that I spend a lot of time carrying a sense of dread about things that are coming in the future. Now I don’t really mean this in the ominous kind of way like something terrible is going

to happen. More, I mean it in the daily life kind of way. Like planning a party for a relative but putting off making the reservation because I don't like talking on the phone.

Like moving the wet clothes from the washer to the dryer.

Like taking the car in to get inspected.

Like anticipating a trip to Brazil with a crock pot machine as my carry on.

If I was the daughter carrying a crockpot to Brazil, I admit I would have lost sleep over it. What if the flight attendant says it's too big? What if it's too hard to manage the pot and my roller bag? What if it won't fit under the seat in front of me? Why is my life so crazy?!

I give the things I dread a lot of power. I put them off, I move them from Tuesday's list to Wednesday's list, promising I'll deal with it later. But later keeps on never coming, and I fill now with other things, always with a small cloud brewing overhead.

Instead of facing the dreaded task head on, I delay, divert, and worry about it instead.

I don't do this with all things. I do know how to get stuff done. But there are just some things that continue to weigh on my mind. If you are thinking I'm not someone to put things off, listen, I'm not either, and truly, in normal life, I am a pretty good finisher of tasks. But even for those of us who are naturally prone to getting stuff done, there are always those nibbling things in the back of our minds that we put off.

But what if the things I dread are actually a gateway to connection, to joy, or delightful serendipity?

What that daughter did by carrying that crockpot machine from the US to Brazil is more than what it may seem on the surface. She brought her mom joy with the thing itself, but she also gave her family a story.

For a moment, think about your own life over the last seven days. Your conversations, appointments, and daily routines. Think about how you thought things would turn out and compare that to how they *actually* turned out, maybe for better, maybe for worse.

Your mom offered to watch the kids but it's not a clean "you drop them off at this time, you pick them up at this time." You dread the details, the trouble, and the work because instead of being simple, it's always "I'll meet you at the Chick Fil A before my meeting, I'll give you my car seat, then the sitter will come and pick up the car seat and bring it to dad's work and then he'll pick the kids up after dinner before the soccer game starts."

Your roommate said she'd be home all weekend while you're out of town so you didn't worry about the dog, but then she made plans last minute and you had to scramble to piece together people who would feed and let the dog out until you got home on Monday.

You went on a trip with friends and, because you're the organized one, they let you plan it including the stops along the way. But forty minutes in, one of them desperately has to use the bathroom and everyone agreed it's a good time to stop for lunch anyway, so you pulled off but end up having to drive 5 miles from the interstate and eat at a Subway that doubled as a gas station because you're in too deep and to turn around would feel like a waste of time.

It's not to say don't make plans or have an idea of how you'd like things to go, but it is to say if those plans involve humans, they will probably change, they will not be linear, and most likely will have some shade of weird.

Upon reflection, that Chick Fil A meeting with your mom may have produced a meaningful five minute meltdown on your part, one you needed to get out of your system and your mom was there to catch it.

The people who helped with the dog over the weekend maybe they were glad to do it, happy to finally have you ask for help when usually you're the one stepping in for them.

That detour off the interstate with your girlfriends at the Subway had you all doubled over with laughter, stuffed into a corner booth because here you were on your fancy girls weekend kicking it off with a veggie sub and a diet dr. Pepper.

When I look forward into the part of my life that hasn't happened yet, every event is drawn out in straight lines. Clear and concise.

But when I look back, it's the turns, the shifts, the "and that's how we ended up on the interstate with a mattress on our roof" kind of stories that stand out, that add color, that make a life. And they come to us by accepting each moment as it comes, allowing the present to be what it is instead of insisting it look like some linear version of what we think is normal.

The thing about living a next-right-thing kind of life is we take each moment as it comes, and make a decision now. We don't hold all things at once, but we trust in Jesus who holds all things together.

And then we simply do the next right thing.

It's not rocket-science, y'all. But it could change your life.

First, we pack up the crock pot at home. We do the best we can with what we have today. We carry that crock pot to the car, get help with our roller bag for the ride to the airport. Done. We arrive at the airport and get dropped off at the front. It's tricky to balance the machine, but somehow we manage and we carry it to the ticket counter. We tell the woman there about mom in Brazil, she smiles back and she nods. She has a mom, too and she knows how it is.

Connection. Understanding. A bit of relief.

We decide to check our bag. Things are already looking up.

Yesterday, I dreaded moving the towels from the washer to the dryer. I realized how privileged this sounds and ridiculous. But there you have it. I put it off for hours. Hours, I tell you. But knowing I was going to talk about some of these things we dread on the podcast, I decided to time myself and see how long this dreaded task would take.

I got into the laundry room and if you thought my last statement sounded privileged, listen to this one. I was actually frustrated that there were dry clean clothes in the dryer. Even more work for me. I'm the worst. I set the timer, took the dry clothes out of the dryer, and I put the wet clothes in the dryer, closed the door and turned on the dryer.

Want to know how long it took? 52 seconds. It probably would have been shorter but I knew I was timing myself and my tendency was to rush, so I slowed down on purpose so it would more accurate.

Here is what I'm saying, for two hours, I dreaded 52 seconds worth of work.

And maybe in the scheme of things, maybe in the scope of life this sounds so tiny. I guess my point is those tiny things that we are putting off and blowing over and sometimes blowing up about. Then we are not being honest about the actual things that God uses in our lives to form us into his likeness. Sometimes it's the big things, but usually, it's the daily things.

Now it's your turn. For now, I want you to think about what's currently on your to do list. It could be a long term thing or just a today thing. What's something hanging over your head, big or small?

Is there a task you know you need to tend to?

An appointment you need to make?

A ticket you need to buy?

A trip you need to plan for?

A drawer you need to empty?

A letter you need to mail?

A conversation you need to have?

A dream you need to finally face?

A check you need to write?

To take action and make a decision on these requires something of you, I'll admit. But make no mistake, putting it off requires something too, and that may be even more expensive. Putting it off is stealing your focus, maybe your joy, and definitely your energy. Not all at once, but little by little.

These small delays are cluttering your soul and clouding your vision. So, let's pause here together. Take a deep breath in, another one out.

Would you be willing to invite Jesus into the chaos of your mind today?

Bring him along through the cluttered shelves of your unfinished tasks as you walk through and look around the room and if you don't know where to start, ask him.

This is a worthy prayer. Nothing is too small.

He knows you, your schedule, and your people.

As you stand in the midst of the undecided, allow the present to be imperfect here. You do not have to figure it all out. But you are also not slave to dread. Jesus came even for this.

Let today be a day you turn towards one thing you're dreading, big or small. If it's big, ask your friend, Jesus "What is one thing I can do today to move toward that big thing?" If it's small, just decide to do it. Name it, and do it.

If plans change, if things get weird, if mom calls asking for the crock pot, pause, refuse to dread outcomes. Remember how Jesus is with you always. And then, do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to Episode 57 of The Next Right Thing.

As you've listened today, if some task you've been dreading has come to mind, if you've decided to finally make the call, create the spreadsheet, brainstorm for the party, or mop the floor, listen, I want to know.

If you're on Twitter or Instagram, share with us what your next right thing is today, then tag me @emilypfreeman and use the hashtag #mynextrightthing — If you write that letter? Make that phone call? Have that conversation. Take the library books back. Let us know. These are baby steps, y'all. Again, not rocket science, just life. Again, take a picture, and share it on the internet and tag me @emilypfreeman on Twitter or Instagram and use the hashtag #mynextrightthing. I cannot wait to see that task you are going to complete.

I'll close with a portion of the Prayer from St. Patrick to send you on your way.

Christ with you. Christ before you. Christ behind you. Christ in you. Christ beneath you. Christ above you. Christ on your right. Christ on your left. Christ when you lie down. Christ when you sit down. Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of you. Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of you. Christ in the eye that sees you. Christ in the ear that hears you.

Arise today through a mighty strength the invocation of the Trinity, through a belief in the threeness, through a confession of the oneness of the Creator of creation.

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