



## Episode 56: Focus on One

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 56.

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're simply in a difficult season of life and unsure what might be coming next.

Decision fatigue can descend upon us for any number of reasons and it isn't always the big stuff. Sometimes life is just full and we find ourselves in the cereal aisle needing to make a choice and we just cannot deal. Sometimes it comes because you have an idea of how you want things to be, how you think things *could* be, but you don't see a way to get there. Meanwhile, you still have to shop for groceries.

As life whirs by fast and you have choices to make, big or small, today's next-right-thing mindset just might save your life. Or at least help you pick a cereal. Listen in.

\*\*\*

Almost every year since John and I have been married, my family gets together around February to talk about the year ahead and by family, I mean John and me, and then my parents, Gary and Brenda, and my sister Myquillyn and her husband Chad. We have a very fancy and original name for our time together – Goals Weekend.

The goal of Goals Weekend is simple: get together in one room without distraction, bring your reflections, excitements, and regrets about the year before as well as our hopes, plans, and dreams for the year ahead. Then, we share them. Coffee and cake suggested but not required.

For years we would plan this in advance so we could all get child care. It was just the grown ups for this extended period of time maybe a day or a weekend. As Dad always like to say “we got together to listen to each others heartbeat.” Now that the kids are older, we just bring them along.

It isn't fancy or super organized. We all simply write out our personal goals for the year in our own unique ways. I tend to type mine up, Dad has been known to make charts, John leans toward a list, thoughtful and concise and my brother-in-law, Chad, does it that way, too.

Myquillyn always keeps her short list in a small hardbound journal or even just paper on a clipboard, written in colored pen or marker. One year when her kids where still small, one of her goals for the upcoming year was to take a shower everyday. I laughed at her at the time because I am thoughtful and respectful of everybody in my family. And also, I didn't have kids yet.

Then four years and twin babies later, I had “shower daily” at the top of my goals list, too.

During our time together, Mom almost always starts us out, reading her list she wrote by hand quickly and then hurrying us up to move on. My mom, who's married to Dad, the radio announcer who talks for a living, well she prefers to go first to “get it out of the way.” (her words) Talking in groups is not her favorite. In fact when she is in a group and someone says, “Okay, now let's go around.” Her biggest fear is that phrase, now, let's go around.

So we all have a little different way of doing things, but we each come to the table as we are and try to accept one another in those places.

My family all lives in North Carolina so it isn't like Goals Weekend is the only time we see each other during the year. But we've found that if we don't set aside this particular time, for this particular conversation, well, it might never happen. So, Goals Weekend is important to us because it's a time where we choose to listen on purpose to one another, to be curious, ask questions and get feedback.

There isn't anything magical about the format either. One year they all came up to our house just for the day – we got a sitter for the kids for a few hours and chatted in my living room.

Another year when I was pregnant with our son, we took a road trip to Raleigh, talked in the car on the way and then we went shopping for curtains.

Another year we got take-out for lunch and met in the high school room of our old church where John worked at the time, pulled up chairs in a circle while our kids ran around and did their kid thing.

Two years ago, in February we sat in Myquillyn and Chad's living room and I shared with them how I was thinking of going to Grad school. My sister shared with us she was writing another book.

That book is called *Cozy Minimalist Home* and today it releases in stores everywhere.

That part, you may know. My sister, Myquillyn, also known as The Nester online and this year for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row, hosted a giant festival in her backyard called The Nest Fest. Maybe you've heard of it, maybe you went - 50 vendors, 14 authors, music, food trucks, the works. It also served as the official launch of *Cozy Minimalist Home*, her new book.

Like I said, you might already know all that part. Here's the part you may not know.

This whole thing a property, a gathering place, a way to bring people together, it started many many years ago, over lots of goals weekends and a next-right-thing mindset.

As we paid attention over the years of doing Goals Weekend as a family, we began to see some common threads, a growing desire, and more similarities than differences in our lists of goals. It was real interesting. We didn't all have the exact same goal or ideas, or desires for the future, but there were enough overlapping parts for a dream to begin to emerge. We weren't sure at the time what it would mean, but Dad articulated it this way:

We want to have a small property used for hope, encouragement, and perspective. A place where heaven, earth, and everyday living come together. It's vague and incomplete, but each of us sees some specific piece.

This hazy dream was a main topic of conversation during our Goals Weekend for years. We would sit in our circle with a chocolate cake in the middle, and after sharing some about our own individual things, someone would say:

“So, do y’all wanna talk about the land?”

*The land.* That’s what we called it.

On my best days, it felt right. On my worst, it seemed straight up crazy.

We all lived in different parts of the state. We have jobs in different cities from each other. And property well, it costs money. It was a crazy idea, to find a place where our three families would serve alongside each other host events, maybe, with music, teaching, crafting, we didn’t even really know.

Meanwhile, Myquillyn and Chad were living in a rental house, one in a string of many before it, and they were getting restless to move away from the HOAs and into a house they own themselves.

Well, we had these conversations and we would sometimes go weeks and weeks without ever talking about things at all. But as it turns out years before buying land as a family was even an option, we decided we didn’t want to wait until we had the property to start offering service to people in the form of encouragement and perspective.

We realized it may be years before we would find the right property or even be able to collectively afford it. But the things we wanted to do on the property, we wanted to do those things *now*.

Waiting can be a type of resistance when you have something you’re passionate about. You imagine a thing, get motivated to do it, make a few plans. But then you hit a wall because this one part over here isn’t clear yet or that other part doesn’t make sense yet. And so you wait and imagine and have a long list of *if only*’s.

It’s possible that somewhere in the waiting, you begin to realize how nice it is to have a dream but not have to do anything about it.

Maybe you're waiting because it's easier than doing the work.

As for us, we finally realized we didn't need to wait for a place to do certain parts of what we wanted to do as a family.

We didn't need to wait until everything was perfect or set or ready.

We just needed to start.

That was the year we hosted an event as a family — not on any property we owned, just at a rented venue. Using my book, *A Million Little Ways* as a foundation, Dad and I did some teaching, we had music, Kendra made dessert, my sister and our friend Melissa made it all look amazing, and we practiced our dream right there in real life.

Meanwhile, it was during that same fall and the summer before it when Myquillyn and Chad had really started looking for a fixer upper that their family could live in. Then, they found one on 12 acres outside of Charlotte. And then, they bought it.

It isn't exactly how we imagined things would happen. The details and the timing were way different than we thought they would be.

As it turned out, the collective dream of the land didn't belong to all of us equally but we still belonged to it.

When I went to visit their property for the first time, before they even officially closed on the paper work, nothing about it surprised me. I'd never been there, but as I walked around, I sensed it. *Yes, this is the place we've been praying for.* In a way I can't explain, this property was *familiar*. As if I had been there before. Except I hadn't.

I say this a lot, but in an episode about focus, it's time to say it again. I believe God often gives us a vision for things before they ever come to be.

This was one of those times for me — this house and property that isn't even mine *was mine somehow* — because we've partnered to dream for it pray for it and wait for it together.

The dream existed first in our hearts and then later we found out – oh – it exists in real life too, on the far east side of Charlotte. It's different than we thought. It's not a family property after all. Still, it belongs to us because we've co-carried it for all these years. And maybe that's just what was needed — this big dream Myquillyn and Chad had, well it was too much for them to bear alone and so the Spirit gave us all a hope for it together so we could co-carry it until the appointed time.

The land is still land.

It just looks different than we imagined it. Instead of family property with a venue, it's Myquillyn and Chad's home. But the purpose behind it? The joy and hope it has offered people over the years? Maybe even you?

All of that started with a family conversation, year after slow year, one prayer, one idea, one collective hope at a time.

It's changed, it's different than we thought, but the heart of it is still there. It's still recognizable.

This is worth saying. Not one time any years past did my sister sit down during a Goals Weekend and say, “Y'all. I've got it. We're going to buy land, fix up a barn, and we are going to host a giant festival on our 12 acres, we're going to invite people over, and launch my second book there. And I know: We'll call it The Nest Fest!”

If only great ideas came all at once. Sometimes they do, I guess. But mostly, they don't. They grow slow, they flirt, they saunter. They hide and for years, won't say a word. But as you keep on, as you carry through with the next right thing in front of you, well that's when those great ideas begin to fill out, to grow up, and sometimes fall away.

But it's all good, it's all important, it all still counts.

And so we had a dream, our family, to own property together. It morphed and changed and ended up just being Myquillyn and Chad but there was a moment last year during The Nest Fest that I looked around and I saw our friends, Tsh and Kyle Oxenreider walking their dog, Jenni on the property, with their kids trailing behind them, in the background I could hear Kendra and her sister Hannah sing Galileo. I saw a young couple that used to be in our youth group that John married.

They had a booth displaying their handmade art, now full out grown-ups. As I carried a twenty dollar bill in my back pocket looking for my mom with my cousins and my aunt and mother in law and nieces all in the same space on the same day!

Well, ya'll it hit me. This is it. This is the church and the work and the dream and the love at the table all coming together. This is what it looks like when you do the next right thing in love.

\*\*\*

On the day when Myquillyn and Chad moved into the house, I remember her saying she had one goal that first day.

We have to have the beds put together. If it's the last thing I do, those boys will have beds with sheets on them when they get home from that brand new school today.

And that's exactly what she did. She tells the story in *Cozy Minimalist Home*, saying "This was my mission, and failure wasn't an option. My boys needed this. When we have clarity and purpose, we find motivation and confidence. If you've ever been unsettled at home for any reason, I don't have to tell you that having one sane space in the midst of the chaos can make all the difference."

That day, she had one goal: put the beds together. Add sheets. The end.

That was day one.

Focus is hard because there's both so much going on and also not enough information. Sometimes not enough time, attention, money.

All of these things are always true.

Myquillyn and Chad bought their property when they knew enough that buying it was their next right thing but they couldn't possibly see The Nest Fest yet. They could barely see a finished kitchen, painted bedroom, or anything that makes a house a home. All That was too far away. All they knew to do was to take it one step at a time.

On day one, she made beds. Day two, it was something different.

Maybe you have a dream in your heart, too. Right now, that dream might seem impossible, far off, or just plain crazy. It might be small or huge or some middle mix of both. But there is some piece within you that you just can't let go.

That little spark of hopeful potential you are aware of right now? Continue to circle around that tiny spark and consider the fact that maybe it isn't random or selfish or crazy after all.

Maybe it's a whisper from the Spirit of God, trying to get your attention.

Maybe it is a hint to your design wanting to wake you up from the inside out, begging you to stop taunting it with names.

Maybe that little spark of an idea is there for a reason, not necessarily because every dream you have will come true, but because recognizing your own desire could be a way of respecting the way God designed you and could even be a hint at how you were made to fully worship him, to bring him glory. To show up as yourself in the world.

Maybe that spark is there, not just for you, but for other people too but you can't possibly know who or where or how or when.

Pay attention. Focus on the next right thing in front of you. And don't get too attached to outcomes.

Dreaming big looks like taking a shower, meeting in February, and sharing your progress, however small.

May we trust and believe the God who goes before us, who brings us with him into the foggy future. May we continue to focus on the things we can see and trust him for the things we can't.

\*\*\*

Thanks for listening to Episode 56 of The Next Right Thing.



I'm grateful for the opportunity each week to share my stories with you. I hope beyond anything else they always create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern *your* next right thing in love.

As always, you can find me at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) or on Instagram @emilypfreeman where I post almost daily, either a photo or a video on Instagram stories. Would always love to see you there.

If this podcast has been helpful for you and you want to make sure you don't miss an episode, I hope you'll subscribe, of course, it's free but that way each new episode will show up automatically in your podcast app on Tuesday mornings when they release. You won't have to do a thing except hit play.

And listen ya'll, if you would indulge me in a personal moment - sister girl, I am so proud of you. Your willingness to do the next right thing in front of you continues to be a gift to me and to so many others. Thank you for showing me that it doesn't have to be perfect to be beautiful - - both in my house and in my life.

The world just got a little more beautiful with the release of *Cozy Minimalist Home*.

Here is one little final note, something fun. If you're in the Southeast you can join me and my sister in Greenville SC because it is the last stop of her book tour. I'll be the host, you can grab your ticket in the show notes (ticket includes a book, by the way). So, join us, come see the #tinybarn, meet the Nester, high five me her little sister, I'll be her biggest fan!

I hope to see you there.

I'll close with a few of her words from the book about focus. She says, "Focus bosses us in all the right ways and frees us from worrying about things that don't matter."

May it be so of us as we continue to practice doing the next right thing in love.

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