



Episode 27: Stop Rushing Clarity

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 27.

This is a podcast for anyone who struggles with decision fatigue and could use a simple reminder to simply do the next right thing.

This is a phrase that's been used by Mother Teresa, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Theodore Roosevelt, Elisabeth Elliot, and Anne Lamott just to name a few.

It's a guideline for living in Alcoholics Anonymous, it's become a common catchphrase for coaches and athletes, in boardrooms and corporate motivational speeches.

So, I obviously didn't come up with it, but I hold it close and it's slowly changing my life.

I haven't done the research myself but I've seen the number thrown around the internet that adults make over 35,000 decisions every day.

Every choice we make determines our life in big and small ways.

But with the state of our soul and the pace of our lives, are we giving ourselves the room we need to make thoughtful decisions, much less ones that actually reflect who we are and what we feel called to?

My audacious goal in these few minutes we have together on Tuesdays is to help create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern and decide your next right thing. So let's get to it.

At Christmastime, you may remember I created a Quiet Collection specifically for the season. It was a 14-day audio devotional series that you could listen to every day to help you set your mind and heart in the midst of the sometimes overwhelming season of December. Over 1400 of you bought that collection and I felt so much like myself making it that I can't tell you how much I wanted to create a collection especially for Lent this year.

But I had some honest conversations with John and my smart and discerning friends and we decided together that this was not the year for it simply because I don't have the space to create it. I love creating those Quiet Collections but the work is not fast and I simply couldn't fit it in and still have the margin that I need to be the person that I want to be.

So instead of offering a Quiet Collection for Lent, I decided to take these four weeks of March that we have and use these episodes of The Next Right Thing Podcast to walk alongside you during this season of moderation as we move toward Easter.

We're in the middle of the Lenten season and many people are talking about giving things up, the sugar, the Netflix, the small obsessions that hijack our focus and the larger ones that keep us numb and disengaged.

Maybe you aren't someone who grew up in a tradition that knew about or observed Lent at all. Maybe this year, you haven't thought about Lent or Easter for even 2 seconds until this very moment.

So in this season of giving things up, I want to enter the conversation with a question. What does it mean to let things go? Maybe not just for a season, maybe for good.

What do we need to release?

As we look toward the hope of renewal and resurrection, maybe we've given up chocolate but we're holding on to something else that's taking up way too much space in our soul.

I would love to help uncover some of those things so that you can move forward in love.

Ten years ago this spring, we bought our current house. There was a several month period where we owned it but we hadn't moved in yet because we had a whole bunch of renovations to finish. For example, the master bedroom had pink walls, no not that pretty shade of pink you are thinking, with purple trim and the living room walls were covered from floor to ceiling with mirrors.

Basically, we bought the house (even though Carol Brady herself would have called it dated) but we bought it because we had a vision for what the house it could be.

The twins had just turned four at that time and their baby brother was not yet two. During those months of renovation, I would stop by the house before the kids woke up and John hadn't left for work yet and I would go over and walk through it alone in the early morning hours. I was smitten with how the sunroom lit up with hope between 7 and 8 am.

Leaning against the door jam in one of the upstairs bedrooms, I loved the way the light lay in long lines on the hardwood floor. I could imagine that ver floor littered with colorful plastic toys, soft loveys, and board books.

We hadn't moved in, the walls weren't painted yet, and the house wasn't finished. But, I could still see it even though I couldn't yet *see it*.

For the last three years, I've had some ideas for a few projects. Some I've done and others I can't quite move on yet. One of those project ideas actually was this very podcast. At first, I thought it was a book idea which is why I think I was having trouble figuring it out.

I cannot explain to you the relief that I found when I finally realized this thing that I was working on that I thought was a book was actually a podcast. Everything seemed to fall into place. But there are a few other ideas I have that I haven't yet picked up.

It's not for lack of motivation or conviction that the thing ought to be done. But I've had this unequivocal sense that I need to wait like a hand is stretched out in front of me.

The image isn't one of a policeman saying *Stop, you aren't allowed to go yet*.

It's more like one of a mom who hit the brakes too hard at the stoplight and her arm

instinctively stretches across the passenger seat.

Kind of like that, but less frantic. More gentle. It's clear I'm to wait. It's not clear as to why.

I've walked through all the familiar stages of new project things with this idea, the talking, the praying, brainstorming, writing down notes as ideas as they come, paying attention to the world around me and the world within me as it relates to the subject.

But the progress doesn't seem to come. Sometimes I wonder: Am I just being lazy? Am I being putting something off and procrastinating? Am I scared? Intimidated? Do I just not know how to begin this one?

That's when the doubting starts to come in, the wondering if maybe this project isn't to be done after all, maybe I have it all wrong or partially wrong or wrong enough to keep me from moving on it.

When next steps are unclear, doubt is often the most logical conclusion. *Maybe I don't know how to hear God's voice after all. Maybe all this is just my idea alone.*

Many times we're looking for guidance somewhere out there, a sign, a word, an encouragement, a conversation.

And while I know God can speak and will speak in any or maybe all of those ways, the most regular way he speaks to me, I'm learning, is the one I have most often dismissed: Through the voice that comes from within.

The good news is, *I'm finally learning to trust that voice.*

We can start down that road of doubt and questioning if we want to. But just because the doubts show up doesn't mean you have to let them sit down. They won't linger if they're not welcome.

Instead, when it comes to those unwelcome thoughts of doubt and discouragement how about let's point them to the door.

Let's make room for new thoughts to inhabit the deep places in our soul: thoughts of courage, hope, and belief. I'm learning that still, small voice isn't the voice of age or wisdom or confidence. Those come as a result of listening to the voice, to be sure.

But they, themselves, are not the source.

From 1 Kings 19:11-12:

“And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, *but* the Lord *was* not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, *but* the Lord *was* not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, *but* the Lord *was* not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.”

That still, small voice is the voice of God as he is united with me in the deepest part of who I am. He often speaks in such a regular and familiar way that it's almost too normal to point out.

We look for fireworks or signals or confirmation from somewhere other-than us. It can't come from us. But he keeps on reminding us that he has made our heart his home. And that's often the place from where he'll make his voice heard.

If you feel distracted and overwhelmed by a particular decision, maybe it doesn't mean something is wrong with your process or that something is wrong with *you*.

I want to offer two suggestions that could help you take your next right step if you feel unable to move forward.

First, maybe it isn't time to make this decision and what you need to let go is your timeline.

One of my favorite lines of advice about decision making comes from Marie Forleo who simply says: “Clarity cannot be rushed.”

It could be you're anxious to make a decision not because it's necessary right now, but simply because it's nagging. This is legitimate and understandable and completely makes

sense. But in order to give yourself the space to receive clarity, maybe you need to let go of the expectation that clarity will come in a particular way or at a particular time.

This could be difficult especially if you're not used to holding so much in your heart all at once without being able to move on it.

It can be confusing because so much of the rhetoric around work, sometimes especially creative work, is that if you have an idea but you aren't acting on it, then it means you're nursing some brand of fear, insecurity, or immaturity. They say things like, put your head down, drink more coffee, and get to work!

But what about the work that grows slowly?

What about the ideas that take years to form?

The ministry that needs darkness and time to bury its roots down deep into you?

The book that only wants to drip out of you, one slow word at a time?

The business that requires an un-rushed foundation?

Is the vision strong enough to carry your soul through the foggy right now?

If it's not, are you willing to listen to the still, small voice and believe it's telling the truth?

Can you hold on to our faith while you wait?

If it isn't yet time to make a decision or to move, practice the daily letting go of your timeline. But maybe that isn't the problem. Maybe, the time *has* come.

That leads us to my second suggestion:

If it *is* time to make this decision and you still feel foggy and unsure, maybe you need to let go of your expectation of certainty.

I mentioned Marie Forleo before and I fully believe she's right: *Clarity cannot be rushed.*

But, ironically, do you know what she also says?

She says, "Clarity comes from engagement, not thought. When you take action, you'll access your natural knowing."

Listen to your life and the Spirit's heartbeat. Sometimes the vision grows as the work is done.

You'll begin to see it even though you can't yet see it.

Proverb 20:27 says, "The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord, searching all the inward parts of the belly."

If you think about holding a candle in your hands you know that if you walk too fast, the flame will blink right out. You have to take slow, measured steps, maybe even block the candle from the wind as you go.

So for now, walk slowly with the flame still lit and continue to ask your friend Jesus about the next step. If he lives within you then that means He speaks, even now, through his Word, his people, and your own deepest desires as you confess them in his presence.

Trust the voice that comes from within.

If there's a longing or a vision growing within you or if you have an idea, a project, or work you can see even though you can't see it, *carry on*.

Walk slowly. Listen closely. And let that candle burn.

It's been almost ten years now, we've built our lives within the painted walls of this house and all those visions I had back then have now become our reality.

Once the renovations were over, that bedroom floor went from being cluttered with colorful plastic toys to Barbie dolls to hot wheels then to nail polish and now drumsticks and volleyballs and a thousand mismatched pairs of Nike elite basketball socks.

It's a slow work, building a life. But the future always comes.

Thanks for listening to episode 27 of The Next Right Thing.

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, there are several ways to do that.

I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman.

To connect weekly stay right here and subscribe to the podcast if you haven't yet. For the month of March we'll be talking about all the things we can continue to let go — as we make our way through this season of Lent I hope that this theme will be an encouragement to you, especially if you've felt disconnected from the season or haven't had a chance to think much about the collective journey that we are all on together toward Easter, renewal, and new life.

The good news is new life is available to you right now, even if you don't feel it's true or have time to remember it.

As a reminder, last month we talked about what it means to take one step toward the people in our lives. If you missed any of those episodes, you can check out a simple recap I posted on the blog. You can find a link to that recap called A Soul Minimalist's Guide to Relationships right there in the show notes or by visiting emilypfreeman.com/blog.

Hopefully, you know by now that 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.

And now to close us out, I'll leave you with these verses from Psalm 37:

“The steps of a man are established by the Lord,
And He delights in his way.
When he falls, he will not be hurled headlong,
Because the Lord is the One who holds his hand.
I have been young and now I am old,
Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
Or his descendants begging bread.
All day long he is gracious and lends,
And his descendants are a blessing.”

This is the word of the Lord, thanks be to God.