



112: Two Words to Avoid

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 112. This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. Many of the decisions we make are second nature, but I'm here for the ones that aren't. A lot of what we talk about here isn't necessarily about the specific decision that you're holding, like which job to say yes to or whether or not you ought to marry that particular person. Instead though, we talk a lot about mindset, about posture, and cultivating a listening way of life so that when tough decisions do come our way, we are better equipped to move through them. Today, I'll share two words that, in my opinion, we can eliminate from our vocabulary, especially when we're talking about our roles, our work, or the roles and work of others. Listen in.

I can't remember where I was, and I can't remember who was speaking, already this is a riveting story, I know, but here's what I do remember. It was a woman, and she was talking about the importance of the work we do in the world, and she was using motherhood as an example. And she made a comment that I do remember. She said, "No one is just a mom. You know that, right? Because I don't have time to get into that right now." And we all laughed because we knew exactly what she meant. We have all, at some time in our lives, felt like a just something, whether it's a mom or another kind of role, just a teacher, just a babysitter, just a librarian, a pastor, a bank teller, a whatever. And her offhand comment of, "We don't have time," she was just implying that this, in fact, is an important conversation, but it wasn't the conversation she showed up to have that day.

Well, today's next right thing is to have that conversation, because it seems like no matter how old I get, or how many times I've actually already had this conversation with people, or how many times I give myself the pep talk, it still finds ways to creep in when I let my guard down. So, I'll say a few words, and then we can be on our merry way. Sound good? Sounds good.

The truth is most of what we do every day doesn't look extraordinary. Instead, it just looks like life; bed-tucking, room-cleaning, budget-balancing, yard-raking, dinner-making, regular life. "But I'm just tucking them into bed," you'll say, "I'm just cleaning the room. I'm just filing the papers. I'm just balancing the checkbook. I'm just driving the carpool."

None of this feels sacred to us, but we've already pointed out there's a killer on the loose, and we've already identified what it is. If you've been feeling discouraged lately, or like what you do just doesn't much matter anyway, pay attention to when you use the word just, because whatever comes after that word is at least a hint to where your discouragement is coming from, and it could also be the key to your next right thing.

Resist the urge to disrespect a task just because it doesn't feel important. Yes, you tuck them into bed, but this regular movement you do at the end of every day, you create safety in this movement. You are making home for tiny humans, and it isn't because you bought expensive curtains or put down those beautiful hardwood floors. It's because when the day is over, you move with her into her room, look into her dark eyes, and listen to what's on her heart. And so your bed-tucking, room-cleaning, budget-balancing, yard-raking, dinner-making, regular life is also your bridge-building, freedom-fighting, safety-making, soul-nourishing, gospel-preaching, courage-teaching, artful life. There's no such thing as just. You are living art today.

Leave out just, and you might begin to honor and respect the work of your ordinary days, no matter how small it may seem. It's a way to be kind to yourself. It's true for the ordinary movement of keeping a home or running a business, but it's also true for the secret dreams and timid desires we carry deep within.

The event planner who knows planning parties makes her come alive, but in her moments of discouragement, she thinks, "But it's just a party. I'm not changing the world or anything."

The baker who knows making treats for people to share brings her great joy. But in her moments of discouragement, she thinks, "But it's just sugar. I'm not feeding the homeless or anything."

The writer who feels compelled to write a curriculum for her small group, but in her moments of discouragement she thinks, "But it's just a pamphlet. I'm not Beth Moore or anything."

The photographer who comes alive photographing babies for her friends, but in her moments of discouragement, she thinks, "But it's just a picture. I'm not a professional or anything."

These artists stand on the line of risk, willing to move one baby step at a time into what they believe might be a small expression of their truest self. So that's the first word we can stop saying now: just.

Here's a second one. When we encounter someone who's moving into the mystery, and taking the risk even though it might not work, please, let's choose not to ask them about their work or their art by calling it a thing. Here's what I'm talking about. So, tell me about that party thing you do? You're doing some kind of a thing with cakes? Hey, I hear you're working on a thing for your church group. So, you're like doing a photography thing now or something?

Do you hear it? Thing is a word we use when we don't know what other word to use. It subtly implies worthlessness, and casually dismisses what someone has worked hard to build. Even though it isn't our intention, using the word thing when we're talking about someone's work, or their role, or their art, it feels disrespectful to them.

Now, I know this might sound picky, and you know what? Maybe it is, but people who are trying something new already fear this attempt is risky and potentially a waste of time. They're already justing their way through, so when they are justing and we start thinging, well, it's a hot mess is what it is. I know someone might say, "We need to find our big girl pants," and I know I shouldn't assume everyone is so sensitive, but then again, why not?

Maybe it's better to err on the side of kindness and curiosity. Maybe it's better to assume that our fellow image-bearing friends and family members are more scared than they're letting on. Maybe one way we can support and respect the work we do is to stop using the word just, and one way we can support the pursuits of others is to enter into conversation with them with a spirit of curiosity rather than assumption, no matter how much we may not understand what they're doing.

When you talk about your own work, don't use the word just. When you ask about the work of others, don't use the word thing. It's one way to be kind to your neighbor, and also a way to be kind to yourself.

"But I'm no artist," you might say, "I'm a banker, a teacher, a trash collector." Well, are you made in the stunning and spectacular image of God? Does the breath of life move through your lungs? Is it a miracle that you can walk, talk, move, and have your being in this world? It is. And you may not be an artist in the traditional sense of the word, but you are most certainly art, and that means no role you have is just, and no work you do is a thing.

As we remember that we are image-bearers with a job to do, let's kindly sink low to the ground, pick up our crosses and our shoes off the floor, eat the bread of life in the morning, and serve it up at lunch with peanut butter, jelly and no trace of crust for the people who we love. Let's practice silence in the pew, and also over dinner, as we listen before we say so many words. Let's carry the mystery of God with us into the sanctuary of the church and the sacred corner of the living room, because every bit of this counts. Let's remember, he carries us always in his heart as we continue to do our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 112 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope the simple habit of ditching just and thing will be one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives. If you want to further explore this idea of waking up to the creative life that wants to be lived in you, I wrote a whole book about that. It's called *A Million Little Ways*, and you can get it for less than \$10 in some places right now, as well as the

audio version read by yours truly. I've actually only read two of my five books for the audiobook version, this one and *The Next Right Thing*, and I would just love it if you wanted to download that or use it as one of your credits on Audible.

Well, as always, you can find me at EmilyPFreeman.com, as well as on Instagram or Twitter @EmilyPFreeman. If you want a transcript of this episode, those and all other transcripts are available at thenextrightthingpodcast.com.

Well, in closing, here's a quote from Brother Lawrence in his book *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

“Never tire of doing even the smallest things because God isn't impressed so much with the dimensions of our work as with the love in which it is done, and we should not be discouraged if we fail in the beginning. The practice would eventually cause our efforts to become a pleasurable habit that we would do without thinking.”

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