



128: Use Your Reimagination

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 128.

This is a podcast about making decisions but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation or just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, maybe a little prayer and a simple next right step.

It's been said that May is the new December, and it's even been called #maycember, not by me specifically, but by people in general. Of course, this May is different. I promised myself I would not use the word unprecedented even once in this episode because I think we're all tired of hearing about these unprecedented times. Well now I've just said it twice in one sentence, but you get the idea. Pointing out the times in which we are all living is just another reminder that none of us needs, right?

So I won't do that.

But what I will do is remind you what an incredible job you're doing at being a person this week. It feels important to look at how far we've come in a short amount of time. Back at the turn of this new decade, four months ago, you may have imagined what 2020 would bring, and I feel sure no one imagined what we would end up getting. And so today I want to invite you to join me in an exercise of reimagination. And here's a hint. You're already really good at it. Listen in.

I have a confession to make. With the exception of Martin Luther King Jr., I've always disliked this idea of talking about having a dream. It's hard to explain, but of course, I'm going to try. And just fair warning, I'm in a little bit of rare form today. We'll see what happens. But there's just something about the posture of knowing there's this thing I want to be true, either about a world, about my life, my relationships, or my circumstances, but it's way beyond my reach, outside of my ability to control or influence. And so I call it a dream.

Dreams are way out there. Things that conjure images maybe of rainbows and stars and unicorns and impossibilities and Disney songs. A dream is a wish your heart makes when you're fast asleep, right?

What control do I have over that? Not much.

Maybe it conjures different things for you that are more positive, but for me the fact that we use the same English word to describe that thing that happens subconsciously while we are literally asleep, we use the same word for that, as we do the deep secret stirring within us that draws us towards something we suspect might actually be the thing we were in some way meant to do experience or become. Well, that fact bothers me.

I've heard all kinds of dreams that people have and you have, too. Sometimes they sound a bit unrealistic or maybe even idealistic, like I'm going to backpack across Europe or visit the Eiffel tower or walk on the moon. And yes, these things may be things we would think are cool, and we might like to do one day. And they might even be reasonable, but then there are other kinds of dreams that we talk about. And that's more what I'm getting at here.

These are the dreams that feel a bit closer to the heart. Run a retreat center, own a restaurant, go back to school, write a book. I'm not against dreams. Listen, I'm all for dreams. What I'm against is the pervasive implication that dreams are things we talk about and don't have to work for.

What I'm against is the way we might sit beneath the idea of a dream and put it way up above ourselves as if we're not worthy to look at it in the face. And I'm against what I think that leads to, which is the subconscious dream worship we can easily get caught up in if we aren't paying attention.

As long as it remains untouchable and far away from me, I'm not responsible to do anything about it.

As long as I can keep that dream in the clouds where it seems to belong, I can imagine what life would be like if that dream were true, but I don't have to face the disappointment that might come if I actually take a step toward it.

Maybe you already have a dream in your mind as I've been talking, but you're thinking, "You know, Emily, I would have been right there with you back in January, but now my dream is even further away than ever because of this ding-a-ling pandemic."

You've already done the work of imagining what it would be like maybe to realize your dream, but with the current state of things, it just seems even more impossible now. But here's something I'm noticing and maybe you're noticing it, too. The human spirit is a curious, fascinating, resilient thing. Not only able to imagine but also capable of reimagining.

We are, every single one of us, being asked to reimagine a different way forward during this time in history. No matter your perspective on the when, the why or how long things are going to carry on this way, the truth is we have all of us already been doing the work of reimagination. Just look around. We've reimagined what it means to have a wedding with brides and grooms walking down a neighborhood street decorated in sidewalk chalk with guests driving by with decorated cars, waving congratulations from open windows.

We've reimagined birthdays and graduations with homemade diplomas and silly reenactments with birthday parades and videos, singing and social distant yard sets.

We're reimagining education with innovative teachers coming up with plans for students to learn from

their homes together online and to somehow keep learning and finish out school year even though everything's weird.

That's not to say it's not been hard and even heartbreaking, scary and overwhelming. That's not to say it's been easy or that the path has been clear, but it is to say that when everything that was normal turns upside down, we are still capable of moving forward together, finding a way through, and even in some ways thriving.

Maybe that dream you have is not for later or for never. Maybe that thing you most long for that thing you notice and think about and wish you could do. Maybe that could be the thing that you were actually made for and are being equipped to do, and now is the time to reimagine what it might look like to finally pursue it.

For years, John and I have talked about the power of the human imagination. Just last week on Facebook, John's shared how we use our imagination every single day to remember where we put our keys, to replay conversations in our minds, even to think about scenarios that we fear could happen one day.

To anyone who says they aren't imaginative, John simply asks the question, "Really? Do you know how to worry? Worry is really just a distorted imagination, a mind that has lost its fixed point."

Y'all should hear some of the good words that come out of my husband's mouth, but that's for another time. John and I both agree that God did not give us an imagination just so that it could be hijacked by fear and worry. He had something greater in mind. Just think about the way that Jesus taught. He was constantly telling stories, asking his listeners and followers and friends to imagine scenarios that may or may not have actually happened, but maybe they did happen inside our imagination.

John talks about how worry is just walking around a scenario. Why can't faith be that, too? Here's a quote you'll want to write down. Another John Freeman original.

He says, "We can use the imagination not for make-believe but for belief-making to shape our faith in the same way we imagine worst-case scenarios and hard times to come."

We can also imagine good things and then live as if they're true. We can imagine true things and then live like we believe them. We can imagine God with us and then live like he really is. We can imagine that we are confident and then live like we really are. We can reimagine the dreams we've imagined and decide to look them in the face.

What would it look like for you to reimagine that dream you've been postponing? What would it take for you to consider pursuing it? If you worry now is not the time, or if you worry maybe it's a selfish thing for you to pursue something like that, consider these words from Henri Nouwen in his book, *Here and Now*.

He writes, "The more I think about the human suffering in our world and my desire to offer a healing response, the more I realize how crucial it is not to allow myself to become paralyzed by feelings of impotence and guilt. More important than ever is to be very faithful to my vocation to do well. The few things I'm called to do and hold onto the joy and peace they bring me, I must resist the temptation to let the forces of darkness pull me into despair and make me one more of their mini victims."

What good words to remind us of the importance of taking our dreams and our calling seriously and maybe turning them into plans. Let's use our reimagination as we do our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 128 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of reimagination can be just one more trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow because it's true that this is a podcast about making decisions. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

If writing a book or really any kind of writing for a reader is something you've put off as a one-day dream, I hope you'll reconsider. As you may know, I'm one of the cofounders of an online membership community for writers called hope*writers, and we're all about helping writers balance both the art of writing with the business of publishing. We're the kindest place on the internet for writers to make progress, and we only open our doors for new members a few times a year. This week is one of those times, and we'd love to have you check it out.

Visit hopewriters.com/join to learn more and see if this might be the place for you to begin or to continue your own work of reimagining what writing might look like for you, of finally sharing your words with the reader. The world really could use some words of hope right now, and we would love to help you find and share yours. All you have to do is visit hopewriters.com/join to learn more. We're open from now until Friday at midnight Pacific Time. That's May 22nd when we'll close enrollment until the next season.

So I hope to see you there and of course, find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman or on my website at emilypfreeman.com. If you have any questions at all, happy to answer them for you.

Well, I'll end with a quote for the writers or really anyone who has a dream to pursue something creative is from Steven Pressfield in his book, *The War of Art*. And he writes, "This creative work is not a selfish act or a bid for attention on the part of the actor. It's a gift to the world and every being in it. Don't cheat us of your contribution. Give us what you've got."

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