



## 102: Say Short Prayers

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 102.

This is a podcast all about making decisions. It's also a podcast 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. I'll bring you a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step. If your concerns, decisions, and complicated problems feel like they need an extra complicated solution, I hope you'll listen in and find some relief.

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My senior year of high school, we lived in Farmington Hills, Michigan, just outside of Detroit. We didn't live there very long. It was maybe just under two years. But several things I remember loving about that house: the quiet neighborhood, the hardwood floors, the back screened in porch, and the color I painted in my bedroom. (It was a lovely shade of salmon that I've never been able to recreate.)

But aside from my own bedroom, the room in that house that I spent the second most amount of time in was the small downstairs bedroom my dad used as his home office. That room was filled with stacks of books and papers. Yellow legal pads – the only kind of paper he would write on. And those yellow legal pads had his characteristic handwriting covering the pages. Also in that room, it had a huge L-shaped desk that took up most of that small room. And then on the top of that desk sat a giant Dell desktop computer.

That year was, for me, an interesting one. We had moved to South Carolina years earlier when I was in the middle of fifth grade, and we lived there all of my middle school years and most of high school. But the summer before my senior year, we moved from South Carolina to Michigan and I had some feelings about that situation.

Up until that point, writing through my experiences had always been a big part of my life. But bring on that major family move right after I turned 17, the summer before my senior year of high school, and my need to process the world grew exponentially.

That Dell computer and my dad's home office became a sort of trusted friend and a quiet confessional. I would hide away in his office hours after everybody else went to bed, and I would type all the words I'd been saving up as I moved through my small world as the new girl. I wrote it all out. I wrote down stories of people I'd met, insecurities I felt, and wordy prayers, lots of prayers.

I graduated from high school that year, and I went on to college, but my practice of journaling on a computer with a keyboard continued. It wasn't the only way I journaled, but it was one of the major ways I did, especially at that time. Once I would fill a page, I would hit print, and then I would collect all of those printed pages in a binder. I would stuff them into clear plastic pages. And by the way, I still have that binder, and the last time I thumbed through it was painful to say the very least. It was hard to remember how angsty I was, how traumatic and flowery my language was then, how I abused the use of the ellipses. Dot, dot, dot. Every other paragraph had the dot, dot, dot.

But still, I'm glad I have a record of those days. Those plastic page protectors hold pages that bear witness to a huge transition in my young life. Yes, they reveal a lot about me, my immaturity, my naive questions, my arrogance, and my innocence. But they also hold a record of God's faithfulness in my life. And now over 20 years later, I still see myself there, reflected back. And I see how some of the same themes emerge in my walk with my friend Jesus today.

In our last episode, number 101, I shared about the importance of reading your own headlines. Like Frederick Buechner says, "Our lives consist of the news we're so busy making, that we seldom get around to sitting down and thinking it over."

That episode was a gentle reminder to do just that, to think it over, listen to your life. Not the one you think you should be living or the life that used to belong to you, but the actual life that is yours now, today. With all of your right now heartbreaks, desires, talent, disappointment, love, weariness and gifts.

Now, a few weeks ago we created our first ever podcast survey, and as of now, over 2,000 of you have responded. Thank you for that. It's so great. One of the questions on the survey was about your decision fatigue. Here's the question. It said, the decisions that caused the most decision fatigue in your life right now have to do with what?

Well, the top four answers did not surprise me at all. The one that came in fourth at 36% was money, 45% of you said parenting, 46% of you was decisions about time management cause the most decision fatigue. But over half of you responded. That's 54%, at the time of this recording, checked job and career as one of the most fatigue-inducing areas of decision making in your life right now.

Essentially what those results tell me is so many of us who gather here each Tuesday are asking at least one, if not all of these four questions. What should I do about my work or lack of work and my family and their health and wellbeing? What should I do with my time or my lack of time? And what about my resources or lack of resources?

All good questions, all vital, important questions that we're all carrying. But I know what you might be thinking because you've been around here long enough to know. You're thinking, "Okay, bring it together Emily, what are those survey results have to do with your high school journal?"

Well, I'll tell you because beneath the angst and the young heartbreak and the way too long descriptions of youth retreats that my journals were filled with, my journals are also filled with all of those questions, too. Asked in age appropriate ways.

At 18, 28, 38, I had questions about my work, about my time, about my relationships and my resources. We all did. We all do. And the only thing that's remained as consistent as my questions has been the presence of God with me, within me, behind and before me.

And while the things that concerned me at 18 seem maybe a little insignificant to me now, I know they didn't feel insignificant then and I know they never felt that way to God.

Moving forward and creating these episodes each week, I am thrilled to know the questions that you're carrying, the decisions that weigh us down together. I'm humbled to hear your stories, and I'm grateful that you trust me to read them. Because of that survey, I have so many ideas for topics, specific episodes moving forward. But for now I thought it might be helpful to remind us. All we included that though our problems are nuanced, heavy and complex, our prayers don't have to be.

This is sometimes hard for me to understand as I tend to think a complex problem or decision needs to be accompanied by an equally complex solution and sometimes I apply that to my prayer life.

It's true. If there was a degree in making things more difficult than they need to be, I would have earned it by the time I finished first grade. My fourth-grade oral book report went on so long I had to finish it the next day. True story. Finally, my teacher told me, "That would be all." And I remember thinking that is most certainly not all. I haven't even gotten to the climax much less the end of the story. I said more words than needed saying, and I turned a simple summary into a full blown retelling.

As an author, I would like to think I've learned a bit about the economy of words finding as Oliver Wendell Holmes called it, "Simplicity that lies on the other side of complexity."

For someone who likes to be understood, it can feel incomplete to say less both in life and in prayer. *Help Lord* doesn't seem sufficient in the midst of heartache. *Come Lord Jesus* feels inadequate in the midst of loss.

While I know our Father welcomes us to come to him, no matter how many words we want to say, I also know it can sometimes feel overwhelming if you don't know where to start. Especially if you're in the midst of a parenting crisis, a lack of necessary resources, a job loss or vocational transition, or a schedule that leaves no room for error or margin. If that's you, scripture offers comfort and hope in the form of short prayers.

In Luke 5:12, the leper prays a prayer of hope. *Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.*

In John 20:28, Thomas prays a prayer of belief. *My Lord and my God.*

In Luke 1:38 one of my favorites is Mary's prayer of acceptance. *I am the Lord servant, may everything you have said about me come true.*

And then in John 6:58 Peter prays a prayer of honest belief. *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy one of God.*

And finally, Matthew 15:25, a mother's prayer of desperation while her daughter was suffering. She simply says, three words, *Lord, help me.*

Sometimes it takes more faith to say less words. For now, this is your invitation to keep things simple. Let's hold onto Jesus in our posture and our actions. Let's not try to pack in more words than our hearts can carry.

If prayer feels hard even while the pressure to do it feels heavy, perhaps you'll borrow one of these short prayers from scripture to hold on to. Breathe in and out and keep the presence of the Lord always before you.

Maybe one of these prayers is for you today.

*My Lord and my God, I am the Lord's servant, may everything you have said about me come true. Lord, help me, Lord. To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have believed and come to know that you are the Holy one of God. The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.*

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Thanks for listening to episode 102 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple habit of saying short prayers can be just 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. You know the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

If you know someone who could benefit from these episodes, but they aren't podcast listeners, remember we provide transcripts for every episode available at [thenextrightthingpodcast.com](http://thenextrightthingpodcast.com). Just click on the episode that you want and then scroll down till you see the green button that says download transcript.

I mentioned the survey results here in this episode, and responses are still coming in. We wanted to give adequate time for everybody who wants to, to fill out that survey if you're able to. Simply visit [emilypfreeman.com/survey](http://emilypfreeman.com/survey) to respond, and when you do, you'll be automatically entered to win \$100 gift card to Amazon. We'll keep the survey open until Friday, November 15th so you can visit [Emilypfreeman.com/survey](http://Emilypfreeman.com/survey) to answer the questions for yourself.

Well, as always, you can find me there at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) or on Instagram @EmilyPFreeman.

In closing, a sweet reminder from Dallas Willard who says, "Prayer is Jesus walking right up to you and listening."

Thank you for listening to this episode and I'll see you next time.