



130: Do What Sounds Fun

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 130.

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, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

We do a lot of talking in this space about making decisions. Okay, fine. Technically I do all the talking, but I hear a lot from you, too. Every listener I've ever talked with or heard from has at least one thing in common. We want to make the right choices or, perhaps more honestly, we want to avoid making the wrong choices. I've never heard anyone say they want to do the next wrong thing, and in fact, that's often what we're afraid of.

A lot of our chronic hesitation comes from a deep-seated fear that we don't have what it takes to make a good solid decision, that we're going to wreck it all up, or that we're going to do something that later will regret. And so we do our best to try to learn all the facts, to ask all the people, to put the decision off, and to find as much evidence as we can that the direction we're headed in is a good one.

Research, advice, and waiting all have their place, but they can be a coverup to avoid a question that scares us to our core, the question that we don't even allow ourselves to consider because we're convinced it can not be trusted. A question that we've even convinced ourselves isn't an option to consider at all, and that question is: what sounds fun? Here's a story of how I'm learning to give that question some attention in my own life. Listen in.

Several months ago, I had an episode called Welcome Your Loneliness. That's episode 114, and in it, I shared a little bit about some of the loneliness I'd been feeling at the end of last year and at the beginning of this year, specifically as it related to my work. I wasn't actually planning to share publicly at all about my experience with loneliness for several reasons. First, it can be uncomfortable to talk about, particularly when from the outside, there may not seem to be a lot of logical reasons why I was feeling lonely. I'm happily married. I have lots of wonderful friends, a supportive family, colleagues I enjoy working with. What gives? Cry me a river, Emily, nobody wants to hear that you're feeling a little bit lonely.

At least that's what I told myself.

Another reason why I didn't plan to talk about it was because I've experienced waves of this kind of loneliness for decades, and there wasn't necessarily anything remarkable about this particular time. I've remained private about it in the past, and I got through it just fine.

This would be no different except this time was different because this time of loneliness coincided with the beginning of a new year, and one word that I've been circling around as a theme for 2020 was the word "welcome."

It's a kind word, and I couldn't let go of it. As I thought about the year ahead, I held onto that word because I wanted to remember to be open to new things, new invitations, and new collaborations. I want it to be a welcoming presence for new experiences, and for opportunities, even if maybe they felt a little bit scary. But I wasn't only opening myself up to the good things. In fact, this word welcome came to me during a conversation with my spiritual director as I shared with her about some fear and anxiety I'd been experiencing, and she invited me to become a better hostess even in unwanted circumstances.

I was curious about what it would look like to have a more welcoming posture as it related to anxiety, which I realize might at first sound counterintuitive, but the more I learned about anxiety and worry, the more I'm realizing what the experts say is true. That if you try to push anxiety away, it only makes it worse. But when I welcome it, or at least acknowledge its presence in the room, I have a better chance of knowing what to do next rather than spending all of my energy trying to get rid of the fear.

Elizabeth Gilbert says something I quote often from her book, *Big Magic*. She says, "Your fear is allowed in the car. It's going to be there anyway, so it's not even a question of whether or not it's allowed. You can't get rid of it, but it doesn't get to drive. Let your fear ride shotgun."

I love that image of our fear writing shotgun. We waste our efforts if we try to kick it out of the car. Instead, welcome it, but don't let it take the wheel.

Well, as I already mentioned, at the beginning of the year brought a wave of loneliness I haven't experienced in a long time. Of course, little did any of us know that this entire year would bring a level of cultural loneliness that we have never experienced before, but that's a conversation for another day. So I came into this new year holding onto this idea of being a welcoming presence and being open to what might come and to welcome it. Cue, foreshadowing music.

Well, during the season of loneliness, I reached out to my longtime friend Annie. When I first met Annie Downs it was over 10 years ago, and to be honest, I approached her with a little bit of caution. It's not because I didn't trust her, but it's because I really wanted to be her friend, but I wasn't sure how.

It was a woman who I had a lot in common with. We both love Jesus. We both were trying to get our first book published. We both had a passion to serve teenage girls. We were both contributors for the same online blog at that time. But for all the ways we were similar, we were also super different.

She got energy from being with people and I got energy from being by myself. She seemed perfectly comfortable surrounded by laughter and lots of activity and fun and I like to watch people from a safe distance and make up stories inside my head.

Annie is bright on the outside and I brewed on the inside and if you know anything about the Enneagram, she's a seven and I'm a four and again that's a conversation for another day. But it didn't take long before Annie and I became true friends mostly in part to her inviting herself to our house for the weekend and me being smart enough to say yes.

Our whole family promptly fell in love with her. And the stories you've heard told about Annie remain true to this day -- to know her is to love her.

So we've been friends for over 10 years, and in that time we've had some adventures. We went on tour together once, and by that, I actually mean she went on tour for many shows as a speaker, and I joined her for two of those shows. We shared a book release day back in 2012. Her book for teenage girls came out on the same day that my book for teenage girls came out. We've traveled together around the world, celebrated business and personal wins and grieved some losses, too.

I met her because of the internet, but our friendship goes way beyond the screen. So back in January when I was feeling lonely in my work, I reached out to Annie and what happened next has surprised us both in all the best kind of ways because while many might know Annie as fun and light and kind and trustworthy, and she is all of those things, but what some might not know is Annie's a boss.

She's wise, smart, strategic, intentional, and solutions-oriented. She's not afraid to dream big, but she knows the importance of doing her next right thing even better. She knows a secret many of us take a lifetime to learn, and that's the simple fact that sometimes our next right thing is to link arms with someone else and do what sounds fun.

After our conversation about the loneliness that I was feeling in my work back in January, Annie and I continued to talk and one of her questions to me one day in February was this, so have you ever considered joining a podcast network? And if I started one, would you want to be a part of it?

Now, if you don't know what a podcast network is, I'll explain that more in the outro of this episode, but for now, I'll just tell you that when she said that I experienced two opposing emotions at the exact same time. The first was fear that led to resistance. The second was excitement that led to possibility, and in that moment, I remembered my word I've been carrying this year. Welcome.

In that moment, I remembered the words of Elizabeth Gilbert. "Fear is allowed in the car, but it doesn't get to drive." In that moment, I remember decade-long professional and personal layers of trust I've built with Annie, and my next right thing was to listen to all those things together. Annie and I had lots of talks about this idea. We did smart things like ask advice, put legal contracts into place, and put everything in writing.

We listened to what sounded wise. We listened to what seemed smart, but in deciding whether or not to join her podcast network, I also had to ask myself another important equally valid question. Does it sound fun?

For two years, I've done this podcast mostly alone now. Last year I hired some brilliant pros to edit the audio and to do the show notes, but the work event, the load and the burden and the rise and the fall of it,

that's been on me, just me. So the idea of linking arms with not just Annie, but also the people on her team and other shows that she'll be inviting into the network and of having the opportunity to cheer them on and to link arms with those shows and hosts and to be able to cheer on new shows as they're created and if having a team of people to help me get this show in front of even more listeners and to be able to actually bring in some revenue for the work that I do here....

Well, let me tell ya, that sounds fun.

I know that's a long story about basically me, but I hope you're finding ways to carry this question for yourself. If you're facing a decision right now, chances are you've asked yourself a lot of questions about it, what seems right? What seems wise? What sounds fair? What sounds worth it? What sounds good, educated, holy or just? These are excellent questions.

And here's another to add to your question asking repertoire: What sounds fun?

Fun isn't the only metric, but can it at least be one?

When you think about your next decision, choice or plan, be wise be kind, and even be measured if that's your style, but also keep a light heart, dare to listen to desire in the presence of God and consider what sounds fun as you do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 130 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this invitation to do what sounds fun 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. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives well.

You may have already heard the announcement, we made it last week and it's been months in the making behind the scenes, but the bottom line is that The Next Right Thing is now part of the That Sounds Fun Podcast Network, which is a brand new podcast network founded by the one and the only Annie F. Downs.

If you don't know what a podcast network is, essentially, it's a collection of podcasts that are made available to advertisers through a single company or a network. That's the official definition, but this brand new network also has a heartbeat, a mission, a goal to highlight established shows you've heard of and to launch new shows that you may never have heard of before.

There's a community feel to it. and we've got some fun plans for the future. And I'm just thrilled to be able to do something like this with Annie. I know you might be wondering, "Alright, what's going to change about this show?" And the answer is not much.

In a few weeks, I'll share briefly at the beginning of an episode about a company, a book or a product I believe in and I'll keep you in the loop about other podcasts joining the network that I think you might enjoy as well. Instead of doing this podcast for free, I'll actually be able to bring in a little bit of revenue for the show so that we can keep doing this together for the long haul. Other than that, things will

basically remain the same.

Annie will keep doing her shows. Annie and Eddie Keep Talking and, of course, That Sounds Fun, and I'll keep doing mine just like always.

But now instead of feeling like I'm on my own, well, we'll be in this together and we'll bring you along. We'll still drop new episodes every Tuesday. They'll still be the same length as always, and my goal is still to help you create space for your soul to breathe so you can discern your next right thing in love.

I own my own show and that's never going to change. I'm thrilled to have you with me for these 130 episodes. I look forward to all the episodes to come, and mostly I'm just grateful that you're game to come along as I continue to discover what's wise, what's smart, what's good and right and also what's fun.

I'll end with one of my favorite Annie F. Downs quotes one we tell our hope*writers all the time, one I returned to again and again when I feel overwhelmed by the daily grind or by heavy expectations. When that reminds me to keep a light heart and not take myself so seriously. What's that anecdote?

Just three words: Chase the fun.

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