



161: Change Your Mind

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 161. This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information, and the sometimes delightful but distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

But before we get started, I want to tell you about this episode sponsor, The Between Places journal. The Between Places is a beautiful book of a hundred prayer prompts by Stephanie May Wilson. You might be familiar with Stephanie, as she's the host of the Girls' Night podcast and author of The Lipstick Gospel. I love what she's created with the simple guided prompts in The Between Places. They allow you to explore the parts of your life that feel the most uncertain, alongside the parts that are concrete, creating a powerful, practical way to connect with God when the future feels hazy. Not to mention, the book itself is gorgeous with its linen hardback cover, plus Stephanie includes plenty of room to take notes, reflect, and even write down your own prayers as you explore your relationship with God.

And right now, you can get 15% off your purchase of The Between Places: 100 Days to Trusting God When You Don't Know What's Next by going to smaywilsonshop.com and using the promo code next right thing. That's smaywilsonshop.com, and use the promo code next right thing for 15% off your order. Now, onto today's episode.

One phrase I often come back to when making decisions, especially decisions that have to do with discerning what I really want to do in my work or in my life or creatively is this: just because you're good at something doesn't mean you have to do it forever. This one is a crowd-pleaser. When I shared it on my Instagram recently, it had nearly 7,000 likes, 245 comments, nearly a thousand people bookmarked it to come back to later. And it begs the question, for me, anyway, why? That phrase has saved my life a few times, not literally, like from a burning building kind of saving, but my inner life, at least.

For example, I've mentioned this before, I was a good sign language interpreter. I got my bachelor's degree in it, and I worked hard to become nationally certified. It required several tests and some travel. I checked all the boxes of requirements, and I had plans to do that work for a really long time. But then those plans changed. The time came when I had to make a choice to continue that work or to walk away from it. And it didn't happen all at once, but eventually, I did walk away from it. I stopped earning continuing education units. I let my certification expire. And that was something I worked really hard for.

I went to school to become a sign language interpreter. I paid money to be nationally certified. I turned my back on something I'd always thought I would do, something I was good at. And I made a decision to do something different, something less familiar, that might not work.

Does letting it go mean I made the wrong decision about what to major in? Of course not. Just because I changed my mind doesn't mean I chose wrong in the first place. It doesn't mean I made a mistake in my college choice or major, or that I was on the wrong path that whole time. The keyword in that sentence isn't the word wrong. It's the word path. As I did my next right thing, eventually, life and work looked different than I thought, and I changed my mind on some things. It means that life is dynamic, not static. It means we're human people, not programmed robots. And just because we're good at something doesn't mean we have to do it forever. This phrase brought me comfort. It's comfort I desperately needed at that time, and it's comfort I still need now. Like I said before, it seems to have brought you needed comfort, as well, at least those of you who follow me on Instagram and saw that quote.

I have a few theories why this phrase feels like such a surprised relief when we hear it. Number one, I think it has to do with impact. When we're good at something, we've likely invested a lot of time, money, and effort into it, so we stick with it, because we don't like to waste our time. And we naturally like to know that the things we've spent time and money to cultivate actually have an impact and make a difference. If we start to wonder if it's time for a change, we hesitate because we want to make an impact. And maybe on some level, we want to be relevant.

A second reason, I think, is reputation. When we're good at something, we've likely built an identity and a reputation around that thing, at least to some degree. It might even be something we're known for or something people come to us about. So we might stick with it because of our fear of missing out on whatever accolades or affirmation might be associated with being good at that thing. If we start to wonder if maybe it's time for a change, we hesitate, because we want to be useful, respected, and maybe on some level, we want to be spectacular.

Finally, I think it has something to do with control. When we're good at something, we've become comfortable with the skill, the routine, the process of that thing that we're good at. We're good at not just the skill itself, but we know and understand all of the people and the rooms and the hierarchies and the processes around that thing, and we don't know what will happen if we let it go. We want to be in control. And maybe on some level, we want to be powerful.

These are just three speculations on why that statement resonates to the degree that it does every time I say it. When we're good at something, there's often more at play than just what you can see on the surface. Now, I'm not saying that we're all supposed to stop doing what we're good at. I wrote a whole book about paying attention to desire, to your giftedness and what it means to image God in the world, often through things that we are uniquely good at. What I am saying is if you're feeling the whisper of change coming, if you're sensing the spirit inviting you away from something you've done for a really long time, if the tendrils of transformation have started to creep into your vision of the future, don't be afraid. By all means, do what you're good at, but just being good at something is not a reason in and of itself to keep on doing it.

Let's take that a step further and say it plainly. You are allowed to change your mind. In fact, this might be the most courageous, spiritually forming thing you could do. In some cases, it's the difference

between justice and injustice, equality and inequality, light and darkness. If we want to participate in true transformation, we may have to be willing, if the time comes, to let go of what we're good at, to move away from what we once knew for sure or thought we knew for sure. Doing something just because you're good at it is one way of doing something just because that's the way you've always done it. And look at the trouble, the injustice, the heartbreak, and the terror that's caused in families, churches, and governments, when we keep on doing things the way we've always done them, just because we've always done them that way.

The temptations are strong, and perhaps never more so when they appeal to our personal talent, success, power, and identity. The pull to be relevant, spectacular, and powerful is a strong pull indeed, and Henri Nouwen is one who outlines that beautifully in his book, *In the Name of Jesus*, where he talks about the three temptations of relevance and being spectacular and powerful. By the way, that book, *In the Name of Jesus*, should be required reading for anyone who uses the name of Jesus for anything. Jesus, who was God, but did not grasp onto his divinity. Instead, he became less, became small, became low to the ground. Jesus was super good at being divine. And while, of course, the metaphor breaks down here, he didn't grasp onto it.

If you're sensing the invitation to pivot, to become the learner again, the student, the intern in any area of your life, I think it's important to name it. You might feel like you're walking into a dark room without a map, but maybe it's not a map that you need. Maybe you need a guide. The gift of God, to the people of God, is the witness of God. God has not left us alone. If you're listening and you sense a stirring, a whisper, a discontent within you that doesn't make sense, but also seems right, please pay attention. Let's be curious about, as Dallas Willard simply puts it, "What Jesus is up to in the world."

In his book, *In the Name of Jesus*, Nouwen says, "I am deeply convinced that the Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self. This is the way Jesus came to reveal God's love." Nouwen was talking about the leaders of the future, but he wrote those words over 30 years ago. I think he was talking about us. When we're overly concerned with doing what we've always done, just because we've always done it, or sticking with what we're good at, just because we're good at it and we're afraid to do something different, when we feel an invitation to leave what we're good at, but we're afraid of losing relevance, power, or reputation, I just want to say to all of us, me included, I hope we'll pay attention.

We don't need your power. We need your participation in what God is up to in the world. We don't need your relevance. We need your relationship. We don't need you to impress us. We need you to be a human person among human people. Discernment doesn't always lead us to decisions that make sense on paper. The spirit may lead us often to let go of what we thought we were supposed to do, think, believe, or act on, and instead lead us into a wilderness place that's unfamiliar and filled with shadows, where we will not be the experts or the smartest person in the room, where we'll have to start from the bottom, the beginning, from the margins. And we won't just be starting there. We might be staying there. If we're listening, the spirit will always lead us towards doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. The spirit will always lead us to compassion, repentance, lament, and eventually, unity.

Today, I wonder what is the next right thing you're being invited to do? And what is the next right thing you're being asked to undo? No matter what it is, don't be afraid to change your mind.

Thanks for listening to episode 161 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of changing your mind 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. As always, you can find me on Instagram at @emilypfreeman or online at emilypfreeman.com, where you can also find the show notes and a transcript of this and every episode.

A few weeks ago, The Next Right Thing journal entered into the world. It's a beautifully designed journal to walk you through a practice of reflection over 12 months' time, to help you keep your life in mind as you make decisions. You can start it at the beginning of any month. It doesn't have to be January.

And as you may have heard by now, a version of that journal was sent out to some readers that was not the correct version. It resembles the journal, and it's still usable. All the content is there, but the paper quality is thinner, and the ink is gray, and it's a little bit lighter than the bold green of the true copy. And so if you are someone who ordered a copy of the journal from Amazon on or before January 5th, you may have received a truly beautiful copy. But if you're one of the nearly 3000 people who received a grayscale print copy of the journal, I want to tell you, first, I'm so sorry that happened.

And second, we want to make it right. All you have to do is go to the link in my show notes to fill out the replacement copy form. Be sure to have your Amazon order number with you. You don't need to contact Amazon about it or send your grayscale copy back. You simply fill the form out. And no worries, all the copies that are going out now are the true blue copies, or I should say true green copies. And they're available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, Books-A-Million, and my favorite indie bookstore that I've never been to, The Bookshelf in Thomasville, Georgia. Check your local brick and mortar to see if they carry the journal, as well, or visit emilypfreeman.com/journal to grab a copy and learn more. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.