



166: How to Cope With Disappointment

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 166. 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 also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step. In this episode, we'll talk about how to cope with disappointment, but first, a few words about this episode's sponsor Skillshare, a digital learning platform that can help you discover a new skill, a new passion, or a way to create more meaning in your everyday life this year. Skillshare's online community offers thousands of classes for the creative and the curious.

One particular class that caught my eye is portrait photography taught by Jessica Kobeissi. Jessica is a portrait and fashion photographer who teaches us everything we need to know to get that elusive perfect portrait shot, whether you want to post it online or update your family photo wall. She covers posing, choosing colors and clothes, and harnessing the power of natural light in less than an hour and a half. Or maybe you want to take yourself from listening to podcasts to creating your own. In that case, try out Nicaila Okome's podcast Secrets Class, where she shares how to start your own podcast from naming a topic theme, to recording and publishing. It's a great class for beginners, and you can knock it out in an afternoon.

With so much to explore, real projects to create, and the support of fellow creatives, Skillshare empowers you to accomplish real growth. And it's affordable too, with annual subscriptions available for less than \$10 a month. Right now, Next Right Thing listeners can get a free trial of premium membership at [skillshare.com/nextrightthing](https://www.skillshare.com/nextrightthing). Explore your unlimited trial access to classes like Jessica's and Nicaila's for free, just for being here with me today. Go to [skillshare.com/nextrightthing](https://www.skillshare.com/nextrightthing) to claim your offer or tap the link in the show notes. Now on to today's episode, whereas I said before, we're asking the question, how can I cope with all this disappointment? And what can we do when what was the next right thing for someone else leads to what feels like the wrong thing for us? We're asking some difficult questions and not demanding answers, but remaining open for the arrows. Listen in.

This morning I wrote nearly four pages in my journal. You have got to know this is not typical for me. What is typical lately for me is to write maybe a half page, a full page is actually my goal. Side note, if you want to learn more about my personal morning routine and how to create your own, you can check out episode 76, episode 90 and episode 141. Anyway, four pages into journal writing and I knew I needed

to pay attention. Why all these words? What are they after? After years of journaling, I've become accustomed to sometimes not knowing what I'm going to say until it's on the page. I don't actually fully think the words first, they come out halfway through my brain, but also through my pen onto the paper. And then I read the words to see, "Okay, what am I really thinking here?" Normal, maybe, weird, possibly.

One line presented itself to me this morning in that way. And it said, life is not inevitable. It's a raw line and doesn't even make full sense. I would have to workshop it if I wanted to make it into a quote graphic or put it in a book. But of course when I'm journaling, good writing is not required. In fact, sometimes good writing gets in the way. But that line was just enough for me to tease out a sadness, a fear and a loss that I've been carrying for quite a while now. Maybe it comes with age, with these pandemic times or just my personality, I don't know. But a better guest is it's part of being human. This acceptance of the fact that nothing is guaranteed to be. There are things that are inevitable, like as they say, death and taxes, of course.

And I'm venturing into waters that might be better navigated by a theologian or a teacher of philosophy. So hear me out as I fully admit and confess, I might be wrong about all the things, but I think it's good to talk these things through, for us to consider our choices in the context of our realities, what we assume our next right thing will lead to and what we do when we believe we're doing everything right, but the outcome is heartbreakingly different than what we expected. For example, maybe we have expectations or have made assumptions about our lives either because of our own privilege, our family of origin or our faith context, for example. In high school, I assumed a lot of things were inevitable, like going to college.

I hear how that sounds. I assumed falling in love and getting married, for example. Of course I would do these things, why would I not? Why would this not be? What could possibly prevent them? College and loving and marrying are three things that I have done as it turns out, but I don't think they were inevitable. Yes. I had some influence in them and I had to have the want to, and the willingness to participate, to do my next right thing. And I believe prayer and trusting God played an integral role in my life path. For me, those choices led to college, to choosing John and to getting married. But for many people who have the same willingness, same desire and the same faith, things turn out quite differently than they thought. Some of those things we just can't control as much as we wish that we could.

And then there's things that we can control at least partially. Like for years I've had this particular book idea growing in the way back of my imagination. It's unlike any of my previous books and the idea of tackling it is daunting and pretty overwhelming. Still I confess to you right now that I've always just assumed that one day I'll tackle it, one day I'll do the work. And I'll pull the fragments of that idea together, and one day I'll weave it into some kind of narrative art and some kind of way that makes some kind of sense, one day. But the truth is, without my participation and active choice to pursue this idea, it's not going to happen. A good idea or an inspired motivation does not inevitably lead to progress, completion or success. The future leaves a lot of potential for both hope and disappointment.

And then there are the outcomes we have almost zero control over. Those are things like our ability or inability to have children. The assurance that they will be healthy, their cooperation to eventually live their lives in a way that makes sense to us, the safety of me or my family or my friends, having friends, finding a church community, having the answers, being understood, having enough money, finding a dream job, you get my point. All of these, I have influence over and I have the responsibility to steward, but they are not inevitable things that will happen no matter what. Life or faith or relationships or dreams might not go the way we think they will or the way we want them to.

So where does that leave us exactly? What is our next right thing when we're confronted with disappointment? What do we do when someone else's next right thing leads to our own broken heart? What if their win is our loss? What if their freedom leads to our grief? Or what if life just doesn't go the way we thought it would go and we're feeling desperately sad about that? Hopefully we know each other well enough by now that you aren't expecting a simple answer. And you know I don't deal in the currency of answers anyway, around here we know that questions, especially ones as important as these often don't lead to answers, but to arrows. Simple steps toward the light, small movements toward acknowledgement, tiny nods of acceptance, and eventually peace and healing.

I hope to offer you one arrow today. That arrow comes in the form of naming and calling out what is true, even if it's painful, uncomfortable, full of sorrow, outrage or embarrassment. What if the first step toward coping with disappointment is to finally take the time and space you need to look it the face? You might be thinking, "Well, I've been sitting with this disappointment for years and I want to move past it." My question would be, "Have you been sitting with it or has it been sitting on you?" If you've been sitting beneath the weight of disappointment, maybe an arrow for you today is to rise up to meet it and to give it a name. Not in defeat, but with resolve. Because if we don't do that, then it's possible it's just going to keep lingering like a gray smoke, a heavy hand on our chest.

And that's especially true if you don't know exactly why you're disappointed or what caused it in the first place, or maybe you just haven't had the capacity to face it. Maybe you know you're disappointed and it's causing all kinds of heartaches, sorrow, anger, but it's interfering with your ability to move on. If we don't take the time to name the specific disappointment, it could lead to several kinds of extremes, either an extreme exaggeration of our circumstance of ourselves or of other people.

First, not naming the disappointment can lead to the false belief that everything is disappointing and nothing is going right. Do you hear that extreme language about our circumstance? Or number two, not naming the disappointment can lead us to internalize that disappointment. So instead of saying this disappointing thing has happened, or this expectation was not met. It's one thing to say, I am disappointed, that's honest. But it's another thing to say, I am a disappointment. Do you hear the difference? When the word moves from a feeling word to an identity word, that's a sign that you're moving in the wrong direction. You're following the wrong arrows. It's time to come back to love and life again.

Maybe for you that touches on a third extreme outcome. Instead of exaggerating the circumstance or internalizing the disappointment, maybe you're just accustomed to casting blame. And you're tempted to paint everyone in just one shade, like a characterization or a cartoon. If a man breaks your heart, that must mean all men are bad. If the church has rejected you, maybe that means there's no church that's going to accept me anywhere. If someone else got the thing that you want, maybe you're attempted to look for all the ways they don't actually deserve it, or aren't appreciating it in the way that you would. If God has not come through in the way you thought God ought to come through, then maybe that means God doesn't have our best interest in mind after all and he just can't be trusted.

If you've been hurt, betrayed, left out or disillusioned, if that thing you wanted so badly to happen hasn't happened or that thing you didn't want to happen did, well, on behalf of all the broken places in the world and in your heart, my prayer for you today is, first, not that it would be eased, but that it would be acknowledged. If not by someone else, then at least by you. How to cope with disappointment, give it a name. I've spent a lot of time avoiding the reality of the depth of my own disappointment for fear that admitting it will somehow brand me as ungrateful, selfish or just bad. Do you hear it? Instead of naming the disappointment, my tendency is to name myself ungrateful, selfish, bad.

This may not be your tendency, I admit. Maybe you've been giving other kinds of names like you've been naming the circumstance itself, or you've been naming the people who caused it. But if you're honestly looking for an arrow out of the disappointment, your next right thing is not to shame yourself or blame the world or other people, even though others might be responsible, but we can let those days be passed. Now, a gentle arrow might be to name the disappointment. What if you took some time and honestly spoke out loud in an empty room even the truth of your own disappointment? What if you wrote it down bullet point style? I am disappointed because, list the facts and feel your feelings. If this feels scary or impossible, what if you asked your friend Jesus to show you what you need to know and then write down what you think of next.

If nothing comes, just move on with your day and trust that Jesus will reveal what you need to know when you need to know it. Then ask yourself, "What is my next right thing? Not my next grand thing or my next big thing, just my next right thing." When you finish your list, your prayer, your honest confession, are you to take a walk? Brush your teeth? Make some tea? Check your email? Is it time to read a chapter? Take a nap? Feed the cat? Maybe after your next right thing, then your next, next right thing might be to choose something to do before you go to sleep tonight that is life giving.

Light a candle, listen to a favorite song, have a conversation with a dear friend. As you find the courage to stand up and face your disappointment today, may your bravery be affirmed with the company of peace. May the naming give shape to what once felt formless. And may you feel a lift in your spirit, even slight. In the words of Dr. Larry Crabb, may God meet you where you are, not where you pretend to be. Let's be where we are today, in the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy spirit, amen.

Thanks for listening to episode 166 of the next right thing. I hope the simple practice of naming your disappointment can be just one more wrong on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because while it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are making our lives. As always, you can find me at @emilypfreeman on my favorite social platform, Instagram, or at emilypfreeman.com, where you can also find a transcript of this and every episode of the podcast. If you like what you hear, I'd be delighted if you'd leave a review in Apple podcast. That helps other people find the show.

A thank you to JamieMurray77, who says, "My friend and coworker, Laura Parker, recommended your podcast to me. I'm so grateful for your episodes. They've helped me rewrite some of my stubborn thinking and move towards more life giving decisions. Truly, thank you." Well, Jamie Murray 77, thanks to you and a special thanks to your coworker, Laura Parker, for recommending The Next Right Thing. As we close out this episode on coping with our disappointment, here are some familiar words from writer, Frederick Beachner, "Here's the world, beautiful and terrible things will happen, don't be afraid." Thanks for listening. And I'll see you next time.