



## 168: Is it Time to Dream Again?

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 168. 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.

As we get started, I'd like to share some words about this episode's sponsor, Talkspace. It's hard to believe it's been a year since the pandemic changed nearly everything in our lives, including our mental health. Some days it might feel like we'll never get our old selves back. And what will things feel like if and when we do? The uncertainty of not knowing when all of this will end is frustrating, challenging, and a little scary. That's why I'm grateful Talkspace has made connecting with a therapist to talk through fears and anxiety easier than ever before. Talkspace lets you send and receive unlimited messages with your dedicated therapist in the Talkspace platform 24/7. Together, you set goals you want to work towards and they walk alongside you to help you make meaningful progress, to feel better, and find tools to help cope in difficult times.

Talkspace therapists give you the support you need to feel your best. And they have thousands of licensed therapists trained in over 40 specialties, including anxiety, depression, relationships, and more. What I find most helpful, though, is the judgment free, secure space Talkspace therapists offer to help you think through your next right thing and what steps you want to make to achieve it. Talkspace is a fraction of the cost of in-person therapy and uses the latest end-to-end bank grade encryption technology to store client information securely and to comply with HIPAA regulations.

Right now, just for listening to The Next Right Thing, you can get \$100 off your first month with Talkspace. To match with a licensed therapist today, go to [talkspace.com](https://talkspace.com) or download the app. Make sure to use code `nextrightthing`, all one word, to get \$100 off your first month. That's `nextrightthing` at [talkspace.com](https://talkspace.com). Now, onto today's episode. Listen in.

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It was early March, 2020, and I sat with John at a bistro table on the upper level of a downtown wedding venue. He had just finished officiating the wedding of one of our former youth group students, who we adore. But if he hadn't been the officiant, we may have been hesitant to attend because of the news emerging in the weeks leading up to that event. A week before that, I was at a gathering for writers in California, and when I got home, I started recording in my journal how many minutes of the 6:30 national

news was dedicated to the coronavirus. The first day I started paying attention, it was 18 out of the 30-minute broadcast. The next day, there wasn't a single minute without mention of the pandemic.

In a rare moment alone at that wedding in early March of 2020, as we leaned over the railing and saw so many familiar faces in the entrance hall below, the buffet-style hors d'oeuvres beautifully displayed in the corner, the small groups of people laughing and catching up, the low, delightful rumble of a joyful crowd at a celebration periodically punctured with a loud laugh or an exclamation, in that moment, I looked at John, and I said, "I have a feeling this is the last gathering we're going to attend for a very long time." As we looked over that railing, we knew we were on the verge of something big. We just didn't know what the cost would be, what impact it would have, or how long it would last.

About 30 minutes later, during the reception of that wedding, we got a message on our phones that the county schools would be canceled for the next two weeks. And so it began. In our North Carolina public school district what started as a two-week cancellation has extended into a full year of remote learning, a full year of navigating life closer to home, various degrees of quarantine, lots of isolation, and reconsidering nearly every social situation, structure, and system we've come to know, a full year of sorrow, reckoning, and heartbreaking milestones of lives lost to this pandemic. My girls will return to hybrid in-person learning two days a week on March 8th, which is almost to the day a full year since in-person school was cancelled for us in our county.

Now, of course we know this year has not been all bad. It's carried a lot of joy in the basket of sorrow. There've been babies born, birthdays celebrated, milestone anniversaries toasted, ministry started, careers re-imagined. For me personally, in some ways this has been one of the most clarifying 12 months of my life. I know many of you could say the same. No matter what this year has held for you, this is a significant anniversary to mark. We don't learn from an experience. We learn from reflecting upon that experience. So as you reflect on who you were this time this week, last year, and compare it to who you are now, I'm curious, what do you see? I hope that's not a scary question for you, especially if you've been hanging around here for any length of time. I want to normalize reflection, but one of my goals is also to change its reputation, because one common misconception about reflection is that it's passive and it's the opposite of action. But when done with intention, reflection can actually be the pathway that leads to clarity for our next right thing.

When I look back to this time one year ago, one thing that stands out was how impossible it became to make any plans at all. We were at the beginning of the great pause, but we didn't fully know it yet. With everything cancelled, there was nothing to plan for, and depending on your personality, not much to look forward to. Of all the things we lost, one thing we lost that's taken the longest for me to name is this sense of possibility. So much felt impossible for so long, and some things still do, if I'm honest, but one question is rising up in me and I wonder if it would be helpful for you, too. Is it time to dream again? I say again, because I do think this last 12 months was a year when dreamers stopped dreaming, but I also want to acknowledge that for some, dreaming has always felt like a luxury and something that maybe you have felt like you've never really had access to.

But whether you set dreaming aside for a time or have never been very practiced at it in the first place, you might be carrying right now today some version of is now the time to dream? Is it time to stop being afraid to be myself? Is it time to go back to school, to start dating, to begin writing, to open my business, to make a big move? Is it time to dream again? If you've found yourself carrying some version of that question, I

would love to companion you as you consider your next right thing.

In the spirit of reflection, here are three things to think about.

#### #1. What do you want?

Dreaming is another word for desire, which is another word for want. If you're wondering if it's time to dream again, a question I would ask you is simply what do you want? Do you want it to be time to dream again? Often we conflate the importance of timing, as if there is a perfect time for something and it's our job to discern the exact right moment to act. This can be even more complicated if you're a person of faith and you're working to know if it's God's timing for you to act on something or not. When it comes to life decisions, like the ones we're talking about here, decisions are rarely as simple as either right or wrong. And the same could be said for timing. Instead, be a kind friend to yourself and answer honestly, do you want it to be time to dream again? If the answer is yes, here's a second thing to keep in mind.

#### #2. What is unresolved? A

ttend to your business. This can help tease out if in your desire to dream, you're moving toward something in love or away from something in fear. Dreaming can be kind of like money, in a way. It can be used for good or for ill. It can be the catalyst that moves us beyond the status quo and towards the hopeful vision that compels us to take action, or it can be a way of avoiding the real work we need to do, the responsibility we need to take, or the grief we need to look in the face. If you aren't sure if it's time to dream again, name what is unresolved.

What you don't want to do is move on to your next right thing too quickly. Author Leana Tankersley says this so beautifully on her Instagram page this week, I'm going to quote her. She says, "When you're grieving, what you actually feel is stuck, like things will never feel any different than they do right now, that you'd give anything to get out of where you are and fast forward to the next phase of things. Trust grief. It will be the hardest thing you do to partner with it, to stop trying to outrun your feelings of loss, to stop explaining away your experience. You will have to sit in it, admit it, and be honest about it. This doesn't mean you're wallowing. This means you're naming the truth in order to move on at some point, when the voice of love says it's time. One day you will look up and you will realize this grief has moved you from being entirely oriented toward the past to considering the possibilities of the future."

What a good word from Leanna, and I'll continue and ask a few questions. When it comes to attending to your business, is there someone you need to forgive? Is there a conversation you need to have? Is there a loss you have not wanted to face? Do you need to leave something behind? Attend to your business, feel your feelings, use your words, let grief do grief's good work. And once you answer some of those questions, when you could be honest about the fact that yes, you have attended to your business, and yes, you are looking grief in the face.

Well, the third question to ask yourself is what is my next right thing?

Like reflection, dreaming has a reputation of inaction and can conjure images of an absentminded person with their head in the clouds, quotes like, "A goal without a plan is just a wish," and "What gets scheduled, gets done." And yes, these are true, but can we just take a minute to acknowledge the importance of our imagination? Can we allow ourselves to see how we need to free our imagination to consider possibility, potential, and hopeful vision for our future? Active dreaming is good for the soul, infused with the power to wake us up to hopeful potential. But to close the loop, it's important to ask, not

always immediately, so what's the plan, but maybe just simply, what's my next right thing?

Dreaming can feel scary for some of us, because it comes with the pressure of a plan. But once we name what we really want and begin to attend to our unresolved business, opening ourselves up to a dream can be a beautiful, life giving practice. This does not mean that you have to let go of everything you know and embrace something altogether new all at once. But is there one next right thing you can do today to move you closer to dreaming again?

I'll leave you with a bonus question, if you're feeling stuck. What is the question you're afraid to ask? If you can tease it out, what's the worst thing that can happen, and then, what about the best?

May the Lord give you the courage to be honest about what you really want. May your hands remain open and ungraspy, and in the midst of fog, questions, uncertainty, and hesitation, as you consider the last 12 months and you peer into the foggy future at the 12 months to come, may the ground in front of you rise up to meet you as you discern your next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 168 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of discerning if it's time to dream again can be just one more rung 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 deeper truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives. As always, you can find me at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) or on Instagram at [@EmilyPFreeman](https://www.instagram.com/EmilyPFreeman). This podcast is produced by my friends at Unmutable. And a special thanks to my copywriter, Leah Jarvis, who faithfully creates our show notes and ensures these episodes make it from our computers to your ears.

Before I go, I want to tell you about a brand new show on the That Sounds Fun network. It's called We're Going There with Bianca Juarez Olthoff. Bianca is such a fun human. I had the chance to sit across the table from her many years ago and was immediately drawn to her enthusiasm. She's a Bible teacher, a writer, and like her show name suggests, she does not shy away from challenging conversations. We're Going There is about how faith, life, and culture intersect and how they make an impact in the lives of others. From faith to fashion, relationships to race relations, Bianca is bringing these issues to the table. I encourage you to subscribe to We're Going There with Bianca Juarez Olthoff wherever you love to listen to podcasts, so you don't miss an episode.

In closing, I'll leave you with a quote from one of my favorite follows on Instagram, James VanDerBeek, and you can find him [@VanderJames](https://www.instagram.com/VanderJames). Yes, that is the actor who played Dawson in Dawson's Creek. He's an incredible writer and shares about his family life on Instagram. And recently he wrote this in a caption that I thought you would love as much as I do. He writes, "I wasn't born in Texas. I moved here. I didn't grow up fixing and building things. Still learning that as I go. Didn't take dance classes when I was younger, discovered that at 42. Never went camping as a kid. Now, it's my family's deliverance. And I didn't get into this business as a writer, but it turns out that's what I've been all along."

Sometimes what we're born into suits us just fine. But if you're feeling called to explore a life outside the boundaries you inherited, don't let old stories stand in your way. Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.