



Episode 22: Embrace Your Limits

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 22.

If this is your first time joining me here, this is a podcast for the second-guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue. This is also a place for those of you who may just need a little white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information or the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment.

You long for thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

This month we've been casually circling around the topic of *time*. As always we are coming at it from a different perspective than maybe you're used to, not so much from a scheduling angle as from a soul one. And so we come to the final Tuesday in January. Man, it's been a long month.

What I always hope for as we meet together in this space is to help all of us develop a Tuesday habit of slowing for a short amount of time every week so we can continue to be people who have space for our souls to breathe.

One important way to do that is to choose our absence from opportunities that aren't right for us, we talked about that in [Episode 19](#). We decide what we pay attention to and what we ignore, we talked about that in [Episode 20](#), and also discovered what it looks like to find mentors in our lives who can help us find our strong no so that we can make room for our brave yes. That was [Episode 21](#).

But finding and saying our brave yes comes with its own set of challenges. It's an important step to cut out the non-essentials in your life - but even when you find, name, and move forward the things you feel most called to, you will quickly discover some roadblocks — these take the form of some kind of limitation.

In today's episode, I want to gently encourage you in that place. There's something uniquely discouraging about finally feeling clear on your next right thing and deciding to do it only to be met with roadblocks. Often these roadblocks present themselves as some kind of limitation. Instead of fighting those, perhaps your next right thing is to embrace them instead. Listen in.

No matter how much I wish they didn't, my children love to go to the indoor water park especially when they were younger. I can't think of a worse invention on planet earth. *I have an idea! Let's build a bunch of slides in a huge, darkish gymnasium. Then let's crank the heat up to 275 degrees and add lots and lots of water.* It's the worst!

For hour upon endless hour, we walk around in our bathing suit without even the perks that bathing suits usually offer. You can't get a tan because you're inside. You aren't motivated to cool off because it's actually the middle of winter and you've been cold for three months. Not only that, but you've just realized your suit is super snug because the last time you wore it was August and now it's winter and *oh yea, I have skin* and *oh no, it looks like paste.*

The first time we went to one such place, I was all geared up for what they call "fun". I wore my suit, sported my whiteness, braved the Totem Towers. But half-way through standing in line on wet steps with my shivering children, I realized I was pretty much miserable.

As I tried to angle myself into the railing, both to have some kind of covering from all of my line-mates behind me as well as to protect myself from the giant bucket of water that was emptying itself every sixty-seconds, I caught a glimpse of the chair section over to my right.

You heard that right, the chair section. Row upon endless row of lounge chairs.

That's when I realized the secret to the indoor water park, the secret more experienced mothers obviously already knew was this: *don't wear your bathing suit to the water park.*

I know it sounds lame. And it goes against everything that we hear about being empowered to wear our bathing suits, but I'm not talking about a body image issue here, I'm talking about an energy issue here. There is a point where you just can't go down one more water slide in January.

And so, on our second visit to the water warehouse, I came armed with my new-found wisdom in the form of a Sarah Addison Allen novel and a pair of long pants. Even though it was still 275 degrees with air thicker than a Low Country summer, I managed to enjoy myself.

But, as it turns out I couldn't focus on my book. There was too much going on, too many people to watch. The most fascinating among them were the lifeguards.

For all the ways the indoor water park disappointed me, what nearly made up for it was the lifeguards. These were no whistle twirling, chair lounging, teenage flirting type of life guards. These people were serious and focused. Think special ops, not High School Musical.

First, there were a ton of them. Second, they each had a whistle in their mouths – Popeye style – and an orange life raft tucked under their arm at all times. But the most compelling thing about these lifeguards was the fact that they were not only always on their feet, *they never stopped moving.*

It was as if they were each assigned an eight foot length of the pool. No more and no less. They were responsible for those eight feet and anyone who swam within them. They paced their assigned distance back and forth on the edge of the pool, and their eyes never left the water.

It was impressive to watch.

Their job wasn't to watch the whole pool, just their assigned corner. Besides, there were several more lifeguards spaced out perfectly around the pool, each doing their job, responsible for their small section.

Possibility can be as overwhelming as it is inspiring.

At first it can feel terribly exciting to imagine anything is possible. You pin adorable posters in super cute fonts to your dream board on Pinterest and actually believe some of them. Until you sprint flat into the wall of your own limits in the form of lack of time, lack of energy, comparison, competition, and distraction.

Our limits might show up looking like failure, fatigue, disability, grief or burnout. But our limits tell us important things about ourselves. They help us draw lines for margin. They pave the way for vulnerability. They show us what we aren't able to do and that can be just as important as what we are able to do.

And so, when you find yourself saying, "I just can't! I don't have enough time, I don't have enough space, enough money, enough support!" Pause. Take a breath.

Remember Psalm 23.

The Lord is my shepherd. I have everything I need.

This is not the space that we naturally exist in. On the level of our souls we don't naturally sit at the table of abundance, but we rock in the corner of scarcity. Could it be possible we have it wrong? That the gift isn't in believing we can do anything but in knowing we can do nothing?

Could it be possible that your limits – those things you curse and hate and wish were different about yourself – are not holding you back but pointing you forward?

It seems to me when I finally recognize my inability is when Christ shows up *able* within me. But he doesn't equip me to do every job possible. No, he equips me to do the job meant for me.

If you're willing to face your inability, you might see something you desperately need to carry on. Your limits can be a gift, showing you what is outside your circle of influence and responsibility so that you may embrace and focus on the small part that belongs to you and *only* to you.

Could it be possible that the reason we are so overwhelmed is because we are focused on the whole pool, forgetting our eight-foot assignment?

As I watched those lifeguards, a phrase my dad often says came to mind – *You just focus on your corner of the pool.*

I know what he means now. You have a job to do and it won't look like mine or his or theirs. It just looks like yours. It isn't the whole pool, but it's important. The fact that you can't cover the

whole pool at once doesn't mean you are a failure, it just means you have the wrong goal. It also means you need other people around you to do their job, too.

Parker Palmer in his book I often quote, *Let Your Life Speak* says this...

“If we are to live our lives fully and well, we must learn to embrace the opposites, to live in a creative tension between our limits and our potentials. We must honor our limitations in ways that do not distort our nature, and we must trust and use our gifts in ways that fulfill the potentials God gave us.”

Two simple questions for you to consider:

Do you recognize your own eight foot assignment?

Who are the people in your corner of the pool?

Show up where you are, as you are, and serve them with joy.

God, you are the author of limitless potential, yet you chose us to be the ones to live out your story in the world.

You who cannot be held back or contained poured yourself into skin and submitted yourself to time and gravity to live among us and to become one of us.

You are the most brilliant, most capable, most abundant, and generous, and resourceful person in all of creation and the way you chose to begin the most important rescue mission of all time was by showing up as a baby - small, helpless, and most vulnerable.

Limitation has never been a problem for you. Forgive us for making into such a big deal.

We want to believe that you have set the boundary lines for us in pleasant places.

Help us to see our own eight-foot assignments and not to become overwhelmed with the whole pool.

May we trust you as we never have before.

Thanks for listening to Episode 22 of The Next Right Thing.

I've written quite a lot about what it means to embrace our limits. If you want to dig in and discover what this might mean for you in your own life, check out two of my books: *A Million Little Ways* + *Simply Tuesday*, both available on Amazon, Barnes + Noble, basically anywhere books are sold.

If you are looking for a book to read with a study group, *Simply Tuesday* also has a free small group leader guide that I wrote. You can download that guide and find out more at simplytuesday.com

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, there are several ways to do that.

I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman

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Once a month I send a letter to my innermost circle of readers and I fill that with first word news, the books I'm reading now, my favorite things list of the month, and a secret post you won't find anywhere else.

January's letter goes out this week, so it's a great week to join in.

There's a link right there in the show notes in whatever app you're listening in to emilypfreeman.com/letter.

You can be sure that everything I write or speak about will always have one goal in mind: to help you create space for your soul to breathe so you can discern your next right thing in love.

Hopefully you know by now that we provide a transcript for each episode, so if you know someone who either can't hear or prefers reading to listening, you can download those transcripts at thenextrightthingpodcast.com. For this transcript just click on Episode 22.

Some final words from Ruth Haley Barton that could be good to remember as you discern your next right thing. "When we refuse to live within limits, we are refusing to live with a basic reality of human existence."

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