



## Episode 50 - Go Forward

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 50.

Whether you are a natural second-guesser, have a chronic case of hesitation, or feel overwhelmed either by your current life stage or a particular decision that is weighing heavy on your mind, this podcast is for you.

As I mentioned already, I'm Emily and you can find me at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) or @emilypfreeman on Instagram. I'm here to give you just a few minutes away from the constant stream of information or the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment.

Each week I offer a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step. Because when you're carrying a big decision or a potential change, the last thing you need is to try to come up with a five year plan for your life. Maybe all you need is enough information to take one next right step forward. Listen in.

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Two years ago, I drove a few miles down the road to my college Alma mater. I parked outside the admissions building and found my way to the open desk in the center that Ron Swanson's nightmares are made of. I walked up to it and requested a copy of my transcript. They gave it to me, I'm happy to say, but only after I paid a way-too-long-overdue parking ticket. I can't believe that I still had a parking ticket left over from college.

And then in late December 2016, I applied and was accepted into a graduate program at another school without much pomp or circumstance. I even forgot to tell John that I got the acceptance letter until the next day.

But make no mistake my breezy response to that acceptance letter was made possible only by months of sleepless nights, wringing hands, constant questioning, and wondering if I was making the right decision.

I know that I talked with some of you about this and since it has been about a year that I have been enrolled maybe you read it on the blog or my newsletter which by the way you can get by visiting [emilypfreeman.com/letter](http://emilypfreeman.com/letter). I send it out once a month to subscribers.

But that was where I found myself with this grad school decision. I think the thing that made it so difficult and maybe something you can relate with, that it wasn't just a question of my own time, money, attention, and sacrifice. This would also require something of my family of their time, of their attention, and their sacrifice.

It felt like a lot to ask, especially because I couldn't draw a clear, straight line from this degree to a desired outcome.

That's the other thing when people find out I enrolled in grad school, the first question almost everyone asks is why. It's a normal question, one I would ask you, too, if you told me the same thing.

Why are you going back to school?

And this, my friend, is the question that kept me up at night for weeks before I made that decision.

After 50 episodes of a podcast about doing the next right thing, I've done a fair amount of thinking about decision-making, about the kinds of decisions that are easy to make and the kinds that keep us tossing and turning.

One thing I've learned is the decisions that often give us the most trouble are the ones that don't have a clear right or wrong answer. Oh, how we love ourselves a right or wrong, a true or a false, a best or worst, a this one or that one. But we don't often get that. Instead, most of our choices seem to weigh an equal amount so when you look at them, you can talk yourself into or out of either choice equally.

Couple that with a decision that, though it isn't right or wrong, it will require something of not just us, but of the people we love.

I'm sure you've had decisions like this too, ones where you could be fine if you didn't do it, life would go on as normal, no one is forcing you, it's not required, maybe we should just stay put. So what is the actual point? For me, with this schooling decision, the *why* begged for an answer while I tried to decide what to do next.

It's important to know why it is. I'm all about having a purpose and doing things with intention.

But the downside of this is we can be afraid to move *until* we know why. And I'm not sure that's the way God intends for us to always live.

I didn't have a clear plan with bullet points, a job I wanted to get that required this degree, or even the cultural expectation you have when you decide to go to college for the first time because "that's just what you do."

At my age, going to school again is not just what you do. Unless you have a specific reason, requirement, or an end game in mind.

When I was still in the deciding phase, I talked with my spiritual director and she said one of those lines she says that I had to write down and I will share with you now.

"Our Western minds are trained to go down the path of explaining. We think if we can understand it, then we can control it."

I'm conditioned, and maybe you are too, to believe that the only reason I should do things is if I know exactly why, where I am headed, and for what purpose. But maybe in some ways, that's just a security blanket because can we ever really know? I mean we might think we know and we might be able to put it in a sentence. But do we really know or do we just think we know and it makes us feel better.

If we don't have clear answers or sure-things, then taking a big next step like this feels like a risk at best, a wasteful mistake at worst. No wonder we have so much trouble making decisions.

We can become a little obsessed with the *why* of a thing.

When it finally came down to it, this is what I knew for sure: I feel a call to the deeper life with Jesus and with people, in my personal life and my ministry life and my business life. I didn't choose a degree path because I felt like something was missing, but because finally, I could see the whole.

And what my wholeheartedness has been telling me over the past few years is that I want to learn more about what it means to be spiritually formed, I want to become more fully myself, and I want to do it alongside a community of people who want that, too.

I don't call it going back to school. You can, that's totally fine, but I just don't.

Going back sounds like I missed something the first time around, so I have to go back and find my way again.

Instead, I'm going forward to school and it feels just right.

I still can't fully answer why. Someone asked me just a few weeks ago so why in the world did you decide to go back to school?

Again, I didn't have a great answer for him, but I smiled on the inside because I've made peace with my answer for me. Of course, there are things to learn and the curve is steep, not the least of which include my actual school work. I'm learning how to talk about this decision with people how to prioritize my time all over again. I'm learning how to walk with Jesus and discern my literal next step.

Things are shifting in me and not a lot has landed yet. But this was the next right thing for me for some reasons I know and some reasons that I don't.

I'm sharing this with you for a few reasons. One is this whole should-I-or-shouldn't-I decision making process with my school decision eventually led to this podcast. Because I was so worked up about making a wrong decision that it nearly paralyzed me from being able to make any decision at all.

So I started to write about that and it turned into a podcast for the second-guessers, the chronically hesitant, and anyone who suffers from decision fatigue. I as you know have released 50 episodes now over the last 12 months, and I've loved it. But on the flip side, I've written way less blog posts during that time. It's the perfect example of how our yeses come with some automatic nos.

But I also tell you this not just because I think you necessarily care about my decision to go forward to school, but on the off chance, you have a thing you're carrying, too.

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Maybe it's something you're thinking about pursuing, starting, making, finishing, quitting or traveling to. But you don't see the clear path, the end game, or the five year plan.

Maybe that's okay. Maybe you don't need to know the next ten, twenty, or a hundred steps. Maybe you just need to know your next step.

And if you're worried how your decision will affect your family, that means you are compassionate and caring and you clearly want what's best but also remember you are part of the family, too. When your daughter decides to play soccer, it affects the whole family. When your spouse takes on a new responsibility at work, his or her longer hours will affect you too. You decide together and then you move forward, together.

That's another thing I've learned from my spiritual director. You support them and they support you. That's what it means to be a family, to be a friend, to be in community with people.

As you look at your own life, the decisions that you're carrying, the choices that hover just before you fall asleep at night, is there something you need to go forward to, too?

Is it time to release a past failure, regret, or mistake and move ahead already?

Is there a path you've had your eye on but just aren't quite sure?

Be gentle with yourself.

Get still.

Stop talking.

Pause the constant questioning of everyone else's opinion.

Now hold that thing, whatever it is, in your mind.

Pay attention to your body and your soul – *does it rise or does it fall?*

May we learn to release those things we have a tight hold on so they will no longer have a tight hold on us. Instead of looking back may we have the courage to look forward and see what might be waiting just up ahead.

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Thanks for listening to episode 50 of The Next Right Thing.

Two things I want to be sure to tell you about before we go. The first is another podcast. It's called *Things Above* and it's hosted by author of *The Apprentice Series* James Bryan Smith. James, who goes by Jim, is the director of The Apprentice Institute at Friends University which is the program upon which my graduate degree is built.

He recently launched a brand new podcast called Things Above, and if you like the format of this podcast, you might enjoy his as well the episodes are short and Jim shares wisdom he calls *mind discipleship*, such a great phrase. It is based on the Colossians 3 verse "set your mind on things above". I'm telling you about it because it's a great podcast of course but also because you might like to tune in to this weeks episode, episode 5, where I am delighted to be his very first guest.

I'll put a link to his podcast in the show notes or you can search Things Above podcast in your listening app - again that's with James Bryan Smith and the Apprentice Institute. It's a wonderful source of discipleship for your mind. And while you are at it check out Jim's books too, *The Apprentice Series - The Good and Beautiful God, The Good and Beautiful Life, and The Good and Beautiful Community*, all fantastic reads.

Finally, the second thing is for those of you who feel like writing is something you need to move forward to. Listen, I know you are out there because I was once you too. I'll never forget the January that I decided to start writing. My girls were very young but I felt like maybe it was time to learn to start writing as craft not just as hobby, and I remember a thought coming to my mind. The thought was simple and concise. It said *Emily, it is time to write*. Well, if you can relate to that at all on any level and have a sense that writing might be something you would need to move forward to, our hope\*writer membership is open for enrollment this week and this week only. This will be your last chance to join in 2018.

It is a community of smart, creative writers who are dedicated to the success and creativity of each member. We truly believe in writing meaningful words without sacrificing your meaningful life and we would love to have you join us there.

No matter what stage of the writing process you're in, from beginning writer to published author, we offer weekly training and support for you as you discern your next right step on the writing path. To learn more, just check out [hopewriters.com](http://hopewriters.com)

I think that is all for now. Check out Jim's podcast, Things Above. And as well if you are a writer or if you know a writer. Please visit [hopewriters.com](http://hopewriters.com). There's no risk in checking it out and seeing if it might be for you. I hope to see you there.

As always thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.