



## Episode 52: Grow As You Go

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 52.

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](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman) on Instagram. I'm here to provide 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.

Decision fatigue can creep into our life for any number of reasons, but some of those reasons aren't as obvious as others. It's one thing to be on the edge of a big transition you see coming, like a move to college, a deployment, a new baby, putting your house on the market, or applying for a new job. All these bring with them major transition, but these are obvious, both to you and the people around you.

What about the ones that rise slow, that come up from behind, that turn your life a different color so gradually you don't realize it until you compare things to this time last year?

When you're in the midst of this kind of slow change, life might feel like an unnamed fog. Today, in the few minutes we have together, let's give ourselves a chance to discover what slow change might be happening within or around you, and how that might help clarify your next right thing. Listen in.

\*\*\*

Some change comes fast - a car accident, a phone call in the night, an almost fiancé on bended knee, a first breath, or a last goodbye. Other change, the kind we're looking at today, comes slow.

Remember when we were kids and people would ask what we wanted to be when we grew up? And we had answers sometimes, public ones we said out loud and also a few secret ones we kept to ourselves. But the details didn't matter because we knew the sorting out of all that belonged firmly in the hands of our future selves the grown-up version.

So here we all are now, grown. When, exactly, did that happen?

It's difficult to see it happening in ourselves, but of all the gradual things in this life, watching as my kids grow up is perhaps the most exceptional. It can also be a difficult or delightful experience, depending on the day, depending on my mood, the state of their room, and the weather.

But bearing witness to their growing is proving to be essential to my own spiritual formation in ways I never knew to expect.

If you're new here, my husband John and I have 3 kids. We have twin girls who just started high school and a son who just started middle school. For the past few years, I've been looking for a line they tell me doesn't exist.

Like the gathering moments of darkness in morning and the gradual release of light into day, a sunrise doesn't arrive as much as it unfolds.

Still, there is a time of sunrise. You can look it up on your phone if you want to. One moment the sun is not visible and the next, you need to pull out your sunglasses. Yes, it's gradual. *But there is still a moment.* It is distinct. You can see it with your eyes and feel it in your bones. Something has shifted. We've crossed from darkness into light.

What about with our own growing or the growing of our kids? Unlike the sunrise, I can't check my phone for the exact moment when I transitioned from girl to grown, or when my little kids became big kids but it's all rearranging me.

They were babies then they were toddlers then they were in kindergarten. We made it all the way through elementary school and middle school with the twins and now they're in high school.

See? I've already passed it.

I haven't known what it would mean to name this slow transition, to point to it and say *there*. *This is why you have a shadow of joy and questions slung over your heart.*

Transition is like that.

I'm 41 now but the year before I turned 40 was a lovely year in our life on the surface, but on the inside of myself, I fought and I struggled and couldn't name why I felt so upside-down.

On the day of my birthday, I'm not sure I can explain it but a lovely calm settled over me and unbelievably, I felt that unsettledness pass as soon as I was able to name it. Because there at the end of my 30s, entering into my 40s was the place between the decade where my children were toddlers and the one when they will graduate from college.

I stood there with my back turned on those days, facing the future while holding the past. I'm still clumsy with the weight of it all. It's an awkward load to bear.

They tell me it keeps going into your 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s. Each decade has its own set of transitions, no matter if you have kids or not, are married or not. Whether you've had the same job for 40 years or you still can't figure out what you want to be when you grow up, we are always changing and these changes can open us up. But they may also shut us down.

\*\*\*

Even though there isn't a moment to point to and say - there, that's when they grew up - I think I may have found at least a hint.

It was the end of 5th grade and the twins had their first school dance, the kind where the cafeteria windows are covered up with black paper and parents aren't allowed inside, only the teachers.

As we walked up to the school building, other boys and girls rushed past us to push their way through the doors.

My girls quickly found friends and, eager to see what their regular public school cafeteria looked like transformed into a dance floor, they pushed their way in, too, and they didn't look back, the door swiftly closing behind them, blocked by a smiling 5th-grade teacher.

That was the line, right there between the painted blue cinder block hallway and the suped-up public school cafeteria.

The line was the moment they didn't look back.

I had no words.

I turned around, my eyes stinging with tears I didn't even know to prepare for. What was going on with me? It was just a regular day, I think I planned to run errands afterward. I probably laughed at myself for the tearing up, but I didn't realize until later what had just happened.

I had crossed over a line.

Those lines happen all the time in lots of areas of our lives. But because they are subtle, nuanced, and small, we don't always see them with our eyes. But our soul speaks a different kind of language, always gathering up evidence of change. So when the tears surprise, the brow furrows, the questions linger, or the grief emerges, let it rise.

These are your growing pains. They need to come forth so that you can continue to grow.

So what does growing up feel like?

It feels like torn lace, like smoke, like wedding mints melting on your tongue.

It feels like distraction, like worry, like chasing but not-quite-catching or trying to remember but seeing only through foggy panes.

It feels like wider hips and thinner lips and laugh lines starting to show up around curved edges.

It feels like sorrow and joy.

It feels like courage and sometimes regret.  
It feels like a lump in my throat.  
It also feels like freedom.  
We are still growing even though we're grown.

So what does that mean for today?

Maybe you'll write a book or five.  
Maybe you'll try something different, learn a new skill, or take up dancing.  
Maybe you'll speak up or maybe you'll finally get quiet.  
Maybe you'll cry at the things that used to make you laugh.  
Or laugh at the things that used to make you cry.

It's true, we've passed invisible lines from small to grown, but there are also many more lines to come.

We are always standing on a line between what was and what will be.

We are all in the midst of our own transitions, our own acceptance, our own becoming.

And so for you today, is there an invisible line you're standing on, before or in front of?

Are you in the midst of a silent transition, one you haven't been able to name?

Have you given in to the myth that just because you are a grown up, that means you're done growing?

Is there something you need to open up to?

Is there something you need to leave behind?

Ask your friend Jesus what you need to know about yourself, about your life, and about him today.

Grieve what you need to grieve and don't be afraid.

Let's give ourselves permission to grow as we go and let's do our next right thing in love.

\*\*\*

Thanks for listening to Episode 52 of The Next Right Thing.

Last week I sat down with Stephanie May Wilson and talked about some of these transitions we all walk through. She asked the question we are often always asking: how can we figure out our next step in life?

We talk about that and more you can listen to our conversation on this weeks episode of her podcast. It's called *Girls Night* and ours is episode 38. I'll link to it in our show notes or you can find it in your favorite podcast listening app. Again it's called Girls Night with Stephanie May Wilson, and that's episode 38.

As always you can find a transcript of this episode at [thenextrightthingpodcast.com](http://thenextrightthingpodcast.com) - just click on episode 52 and then scroll down to the button that says "download transcript."

Again thanks to all who have left reviews on iTunes. That is a lovely and free way to spread the word about the podcast. And this is fun, if you are on Instagram and you share this episode or others on your Instagram stories, I would love to highlight you on my stories - shoutout to Terrance Jackson @terrancedjackson on Instagram who has thus far been my favorite Instagram story — here's what he had to say about this podcast:

"Terrance tell me about your experience with Emily P. Freeman. Ok, so literally the first time, the first time that I played it, I played the first episode and then the next thing I know twenty episodes went by. I don't know where but twenty episodes. I was like how did this happen? It's a trance. She is a trance. She's like a Jesus-trance. She's a Jance."

(Emily laughs) O, that was good Terrance.

Thank you to Erin Moon for sharing that gift with the world. And Terrance, thanks for listening to The Next Right Thing. This will never not be my favorite.

Whew, good time.

A few final words from Ronald Rolheiser in his book, *The Holy Longing*:

“Delight is rare for adults, though not for children. If you want to see what delight looks like, go by any schoolyard sometime when kids, little kids, kindergartners and first graders, come out for their recess break. They simply run around and shriek. Now that’s delight. This, the spontaneous response to the goodness and beauty of life.”

As always, thanks so much for listening, and I’ll see you next time.