



Episode 54: Find Someone to Mother

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 54.

Each week I offer a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step. If this is your first time joining us here, I hope you'll feel welcome and I hope you'll come back.

This is a place where for a few minutes every week I try to help you create a little space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing in love. Last week episode 53 was all about allowing the present to be imperfect so you can finally learn to rest. This week we'll take it a step further and dare to name a longing we all have that, I think, is easy for us to deny or overlook. But it could prove to be a necessary part of discerning our next right thing.

A bonus for today, I'm going to share some quotes from one of my new favorite books. So, listen in.

If you've been around here for any length of time, you may already know that we live in a quiet cul-de-sac, the houses were built in the mid 1960's all tucked in with one another beneath mature, leafy trees around a patch of grass in the center, two benches bearing witness to our living. John's brother and his family live 2 doors down and my mother in law lives next door to him and it's basically become normal for our neighbors to share front yards and last names.

Our neighbors are literally our family and if you ask me how I feel about that, I'll have to pause for a minute and think about it because what is common becomes normal and what is normal often becomes unexamined and that's certainly true of our cul-de-sac life. It's just our regular normal life.

I tell you all of that simply so you'll understand that we are surrounded by family and that's a normal part of our experience. Oh, and I told you how John's brother lives in the cul-de-sac with us,

but I forgot to mention his sister also lives in the neighborhood but a few streets over till close, but not close enough to see every day.

Yesterday, she came to the house, picked up one of our girls and took her out driving not on the roads yet as she's only fourteen but in a parking lot nearby. She's already taken drivers ed and so in a few months she will be able to get her permit once she turns fifteen. When she got home after practice driving with her aunt, I asked her how it went and of course, she loved every minute of it and as I walked upstairs after our brief conversation, I was grateful for Susan, my sister-in-law, this woman who never had children of her own but continues to mother mine.

At church on Sunday I stood in line for communion, approached the plate and received the Body of Christ broken for me from a woman in our congregation her eyes gentle, her voice kind as she said my name and offered me the bread.

Every single solitary time my friend Wendy stands up and reads the prayer of renewal at church, I resist the urge to bury my face in my hands and cry like a worn-out baby. I'm struck, every time, by the power of the Spirit in her voice and in her words. I tear up even now as it comes to mind.

None of these, a parking lot drive, an offer of bread, a prayer of renewal not one of them requires you to be a mother. But in each of these actions was something a mother would do.

In these actions, I felt cared for. And the words of my friend Shannan Martin come to mind. She says, "Humanity is crying out to be nurtured."

It's why when I went to the doctor's office for a routine checkup during a particularly overwhelming time, I had to fight back a lump in my throat when the nurse took extra care when taking my vitals.

It's why, when we're sad and someone moves toward us in kindness, it makes us cry even more.

In those moments of vulnerability, we want to say "don't look at me!" or "let's change the subject!" because what we've realized we want more than anything is to be seen and to be cared for. But when we get it, it's almost too much to bear.

No matter how old we are, I think most of us secretly want someone to rub our back, hold our juice box, and tell us everything's gonna be okay.

Is it really okay? I don't know. I hope so. God says it will be, eventually.

But this week I just felt like we, as a community of listeners, as the Body of Christ, as people living in the Kingdom of God, our own neighborhoods, towns, states, and countries we need a good bit of nurturing.

In a world that seems to only value a twisted kind of angular strength, let's find ways to receive the curves, to find ourselves conforming to their shape, to hold the delicate tension that often exists between comfort and risk and to not force something to be true or to be understood or to be grabbed hold of before it's ready.

In her book, *The Ministry of Ordinary Places*, Shannan Martin makes a bold declaration that we are all mothers. She has four of her own who came to her, not from her body, but across oceans and rivers and now she paints mothering in broad strokes, reminding us that it doesn't matter where you live, what you look like, or how different you feel from the people around you.

What matters is this: are you paying attention? Are you able to see the heart cry of the people in your path? Are you able to admit your own heart's cry within you?

She says this and I'll quote her directly, "We are life givers, each of us, in ways both wild and vast. Our title as mother isn't defined by biology or science. It can't be measured in centimeters or the arc of a curve. Mothering is the thing *all* women do, with the small and big kids under our care, the neighbor boys up the street, our students, our grown nieces, the children we can only hold in our hearts, and the ones we don't even know yet to hope for. What I'm trying to say is that none of us is off the hook here. Humanity is crying out to be nurtured."

Humanity is crying out to be nurtured.

Don't we know its true?

If you're stuck in a decision, wondering what's next, longing for something you don't yet have are you willing to ask God to nurture you in ways only he can, right here in the midst of your own mess, in the midst of your unknowing, in the middle of the week? Can you trust him to receive you as a mother receives her children? To come alongside and declare your heart whole?

Can we, as humans among humans, move into the world with the eyes of a mother, scanning the horizon for others who long to be nurtured as well? We will know it in them because we see it in us.

If you're feeling unseen, may you learn how to see.

If you're feeling unsure, find someone to be sure of.

If you're feeling untethered, find someone to care for.

If you're feeling too closed up for any of that, here's a simple practice for today.

Start with two clenched fists and count on your fingers ten things occupying your mind, opening one finger for each occupation.

One, that pressing deadline, two your hard morning conversation. Three, preparing for a trip, four, five, six, that end of month decision, seven, your longing for a friend, eight, nine, ten, all the things you feel you don't have words for yet.

Now you have two open hands ready to receive something. Will you let God move toward you the way a mother would do? Nurture you in all the ways you most long for?

Don't be afraid of the curve of the question mark.

Sometimes when we see the pain of the world around us we get stuck and don't know what to do because we are afraid we are going to do it wrong.

Humanity is crying out to be nurtured.

Find someone to mother.

But maybe refuse to believe that everyone needs to be mothered the same.

It could be that someone needs nurturing in a way that doesn't come natural to you. In a way that seems strange or foreign to you, or in a way that doesn't make sense.

Humanity cries out to be nurtured.

But don't you forget, you are human too, you need this equally.

We need each other we belong to each other. May we not forget.

Receive from God the kind of nurturing that you need and ask your friend Jesus how you might be a mother to someone else in a way that they need.

Be willing to stand in the gap.

Be willing to be uncomfortable.

Be willing to do it differently than it was done for you.

Let's be open.

Let's be kind.

Let's embrace the nuance and the layers and all that space that we don't understand, may we move into it with confidence because we don't move into it alone.

Let God care for you.

Then finish the work.

Receive from God then turn around and let him care for others through you

Maybe this is your next right thing today.

Thanks for listening to Episode 54 of The Next Right Thing.

The book I mentioned in this episode, *The Ministry of Ordinary Places*, is a brand new one, releasing this very week.

It's written by my dear friend Shannan Martin and I was glad to offer a line of endorsement for it. Shannan found her ministry in her ordinary place, like really. Her work is her neighborhood, she writes books as a side hustle. Front and center are the people around her. I am grateful to Shannan for living her one life well and writing it all down.

I wrote a little more about how this book taught me how to see, how to stay, and how to get over myself. You can read about it on my blog at emilypfreeman.com I'll put a direct link to it here in the show notes. I will say one more thing about this beautiful book and then I promise I'll stop: If you've ever felt broken hearted over the state of the world but don't know where to begin to make a difference, grab a copy of this book. It is, in my opinion, one of the best books of 2018 and it's the right book for this moment in our history.

As always, you can find me at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram @emilypfreeman. If you like this podcast, help us out by leaving a review on itunes and then share it with a friend who might benefit from a story, a prayer, and a simple next right step. It's an honor to spend a few minutes with you each week.

Okay, fine. One more one more mothering reminder from Shannan's book, and we'll close with this.

“Beginning to live as though there's no such thing as other people's children might be our most critical, significant contribution to the flourishing of our world. Simply believing this, however, is not enough, and sympathy without action is no more than wasted breath. Mothering is often physical, gut wrenching work.”

Well, that's all for now. Thank you, Shannan, for this powerful book and thank you for listening, and I'll see you next time.