



Episode 67: Wait Now Go

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 67.

A few episodes ago I opened with a few lines from Irish poet, author, and priest John O'Donohue and today I've got a few more for you. He speaks of waiting, *saying this*:

You are in this time of the interim where everything seems withheld.
The path you took to get here has washed out; the way forward is still concealed from you.
You cannot lay claim to anything; In this place of dusk, your eyes are blurred;
And there is no mirror.

What a poetic visual of how it feels to wait. In that same episode, episode 65 I invited us to take off our crowns, to remember the true kingdom doesn't, in fact, belong to me and I do not, in fact, reign over it. As we do the hard work of reaching up and removing our own self-assigned deities on the daily, our next step may still feel unclear.

I'm not in charge. Now what?

Well, I think it's time to talk about something you might not like at first. We touched on it a little bit last week and I'll be honest, I don't love it either, but it's such an important part of developing a healthy next-right-thing mindset to ignore it feels irresponsible in a way.

I'm talking about waiting because so much of our lives are filled with it but no one really ever teaches us how to do it. How do we know when we need to wait? How do we know when it's time to move?

There are several kinds of waiting, today I'll share four: The kind we talk about, the kind we don't talk about, the kind that sneaks up on you, and the kind that needs to stop.

Listen in.

All waiting is not created equal. This I know for sure.

In one way or another, we are all waiting for something right now. We go to work and the grocery store, have casual conversations about the unseasonable weather. But on the inside, we sit alone in our waiting rooms, always with one eye toward that door that keeps not opening.

It will never make a headline, but with so many of us here in this space it feels important to talk about. I'll attempt to put words on that waiting movement that happens within us while we're busy doing other things.

First, the kind of waiting we all talk about.

Each summer, we travel with John's side of the family to a beach house for a week, seven adults and six kids under one roof for every meal and movie night. It's actually one of my favorite weeks of the year.

Now that our kids are teenagers, John and I have found the morning hours at the beach to be sacred as the kids sleep almost until lunchtime that means we have the morning to take our time.

We wake up to the sound of waves hitting the beach. We grab coffee and fold up chairs we brought from home, walk down to the shore and face ourselves east.

The waiting here is easy. We know that sun will rise.

What a luxury to wait for something to happen that you know is going to happen. We learned this in kindergarten. We learned to wait in line, wait your turn, wait for Christmas, all those things had the end built right in. We understood the exchange. We will have patience, and then we will get our reward in time.

There is still growth in this kind of waiting. It takes maturity that we aren't born with to learn to wait for results, outcomes, and the passing of time.

So we make our paper chains to count down the days, watch the dough rise through the oven door. We set our clocks to wake for when morning finally comes.

Just because you know the wait will come to an end doesn't make it easy. But for the most part, this waiting is a function of time and time will always pass.

The second kind of waiting is the kind that sneaks up on you.

Sometimes you don't realize you're waiting until you're almost through it. I would say this is a good thing, except the unawareness of the waiting time can often manifest itself in kind of weird ways like irritability, restlessness, or indecision to name a few.

My entire 39th year I was waiting to turn 40. I didn't realize it until just before my birthday, but all the anxiety, the questions, the second-guessing, the strange new fears that I couldn't explain or pin down. Once my birthday passed all of that went with it.

Oh, I realized. I have been holding my breath. I didn't even notice.

Another kind of waiting is the kind we don't talk about or at least the kind we don't like to talk about.

Like waiting for results when good results aren't guaranteed, or maybe we won't get any results at all.

This is the kind that can break your heart because it doesn't come with arrows or endpoints.

This kind of waiting is a perpetual bachelor. He shows up in your life a mysterious stranger, he gives hints and hopes about the future but he never makes any promises.

This may or may not be. You'll just have to wait and see.

The kind of waiting that's easy to talk about is the kind we can measure in time. And while it's true we can't control time or make it tick by faster, at least it has a track record. It's gonna pass. But this kind of waiting leads only to more waiting. Or worse, it builds up then fizzles out.

And this doesn't mean we aren't moving. It does mean we may be waiting for something and moving toward something that may never come to be, even while we hope for it, and hold it, and look forward to it.

On the one hand, this feels like terrible news. And in some ways, I guess it is.

But there is another hand.

Because there's a fourth kind of waiting that needs to stop, and maybe it can help inform the other kinds when they come.

On one of our most recent trips to the beach with the family, once the sun came up, John and I made our way back to the beach house, we refilled our coffee mugs, and settled in on the porch to face the waves again, this time we could only see them from a distance.

We were closer to the trees near the house and they offered shade from the sun, that was now rising higher in the sky as we read.

But I couldn't focus on my book that morning because I was watching as a squirrel scurried up the skinny trunk in front of us, took aim at a branch on a nearby tree, and flung himself through the air, nearly missing that branch he was aiming for.

He landed without falling but not without fanfare.

The next morning, we did the whole thing again, got up early, watched the sun rise over the shore, and spent the late morning back near the house on the deck again under the trees.

Again, I saw another squirrel do this same routine: climb the skinny trunk in front of us, aim toward the branch on the nearby tree, fly, nearly miss, barely catch and continue on with his climb.

It occurred to me that this is either the exact same squirrel or it's what all the squirrels do in that particular spot.

What looks to me like a near miss is actually routine. What seems to be a miscalculation is a regular part of the plan.

Progress looked sloppy and not well-thought out. But it didn't have to be because the squirrel made that jump every single day.

Maybe that sloppy jump was not the result of a poor decision. Maybe it was simply the only way across.

I want my leaps to be thoughtful, measured, and well-planned. Sometimes that works out, but if I wait for that as the only clue that it's time to move, I may be waiting past my queue.

Sometimes when I think I'm waiting on God, he's actually waiting on me.

We wait for things we know will happen, things we hope will come to be. We try to wait until the right time and sometimes we don't realize we're waiting at all.

So here's to you who wait for the measurable things – the birth, the graduation, the answer, the arrival of a friend. Take heart, it won't be like this forever.

Or maybe you feel disoriented, discouraged, or unsure but you don't know why? Take a moment to peruse the hidden waiting lists you might be on. Consider if you might be waiting for something you've yet to acknowledge. Perhaps just admitting it will bring the slightest lift.

And for you who continue to wait for things unmeasured, for healing you're not sure will come or the love you're not sure you'll find. May you find comfort in the presence of our friend Jesus even though you may not have the answers you're looking for.

Or maybe you find yourself standing on the edge of a branch, gazing over at the next tree, looking for the solid path. If the time to move has come, may you have the courage to do the next right thing no matter how sloppy or unsure.

As you trip and limp your way into your next thing, resist the urge to carry shame, anger, or fear into your future. You're not going to need that for this journey that you are on. And remember just because the move was sloppy doesn't mean the time was wrong.

Thanks for listening to Episode 67 of The Next Right Thing.

In your life right now, the truth is you probably can relate to all four kinds of waiting addressed in this episode depending on the area of life you're thinking about.

Before we sign off, if one of those areas for you is writing then I want to talk to you specifically.

If the branch you're standing on is one of fear and the tree you're trying to jump to is called "finally taking my writing seriously" I'm here to tell you it's time to jump.

There may be a lot of good reasons not to do something in life, but don't ever let fear be one of them. If you are a writer who wants to pivot from writing in private to writing for a reader, I hope you'll check out hope*writers at hopewriters.com/join.

We started hope*writers three years ago and we have met so many wonderful, creative writers who are writing meaningful words without sacrificing their meaningful lives.

As much as I love to try to keep these episodes as evergreen as possible, sometimes things are happening that I've got to tell you about so if you're listening to this after January 25, you can still visit hopewriters.com/join and get on the waiting list to be notified about our next open enrollment period.

BUT, I'm here to tell you now that our membership is open for enrollment this week until Friday night at midnight. If you've never heard of hope*writers, it's a community of smart, creative writers who are dedicated to the success and creativity of each member. If you've been waiting to take your writing life seriously, maybe it's time to stop waiting and take a step into hope*writers.

And listen, it doesn't 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 thing and your next right step on the writing path. To learn more, just check out hopewriters.com/join. We would love to have you join us. Or if you know someone who you are thinking of in your mind right now and she needs to know about this, go ahead and send her the link or forward the episode to her.

As always, you can find me [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman) on Instagram or at emilypfreeman.com and we have transcripts available for each episode at thenextrightthingpodcast.com.

I'll read the rest of the quote I started from John O'Donohue at the beginning of the episode. May his timely words of blessing carry you through the wait and deliver you into clarity for your next right thing no matter what it is.

You are in this time of the interim where everything seems withheld.
The path you took to get here has washed out; the way forward is still concealed from you.
You cannot lay claim to anything; In this place of dusk, your eyes are blurred;
And there is no mirror.

As far as you can, hold your confidence.
Do not allow your confusion to squander
This call which is loosening your roots in false ground,
that you might come free from all you have outgrown.

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