



## 88: Come Away for Awhile

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 88.

This is a podcast all about making decisions. It's also a podcast about making a life.

If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

There's a line from Dallas Willard I've heard repeated several times over the years where he says, "If you don't come apart for a while you will come apart after a while." But I'll be honest I always remember it as "*if you don't come away for a while, you will come apart after a while.*"

That way makes more sense in my brain but either way, the intention is the same. We are made in the image of God so what did God do as a human? The life of Jesus makes it so we don't have to wonder.

When God came to earth in the person of Jesus, he got away alone. Even though he remained in constant communion with his Father when he walked along the road and had lunch with his neighbors and taught on the mountainside, he still found it necessary to get away. If God himself set an intention to come away for a while, how much more is it necessary for us? And what does that look like in our regular life?

That's the topic of today's reflection and your practical invitation to a potential next right thing. Listen in.

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John and I got married in the summer of 2001. The week we got home from our honeymoon, we loaded up in a van with high school students and chaperoned or kind of co-led a mission trip to Washington D.C. And we didn't stop for 12 years. Well, except the fall of 2011, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

From the beginning of our marriage and for the next 12 years, John was a youth pastor without any significant break. If you were a first-grader in 2001, John could have been your youth pastor your senior year of high school. That's how long he was in youth ministry. The thing was, though, he served at two different churches so if you were a first grader at one of them, by the time you got to high school we had already changed churches.

Both the churches where he served supported their pastors through offering a sabbatical. Every seven years of ministry, the pastors were given some time off to rest, renew, and refocus. But we left both places at the six year mark and never had the chance for that organized, seven year intentional space of sabbatical.

In episode 87 I mentioned creating space for your soul to breathe is not only for those who consider themselves contemplative. It's true the traditionally contemplative people among us may see the need for time away more quickly and may find it easier to prioritize, but as people who live in the kingdom of God, we are praying people. And prayer is a reminder that God is not in a hurry. His work is often painfully inefficient, at least according to my timetable. And sometimes, especially in times of decision and discernment, coming away to listen and simply be is not only a luxury but a necessity.

So as a pastor, John missed that opportunity for a formal sabbatical in the churches where he worked and before you say it, I know you might be thinking well cry me a river, right? Because I recognize the remarkable privilege it is to receive a sabbatical at all. I thought about this a lot last summer during my History and Traditions of Christian Spiritual Formation class because our teacher, AJ Swoboda, was entering into a time of sabbatical himself right after our class was over. He acknowledged the discomfort this sometimes brings up - like *how come you get to take a break from work when so many people around the world have to work 2 jobs just to get the bare necessities and sometimes not even that? Where is their sabbatical?*

His response to this has stayed with me. He simply said, “The problem isn’t that the rich get a sabbatical but that the poor don’t. And the poor won’t get one until the rich start taking them because these are the times when we have our best ideas.”

Interesting point, I thought. This need for us to come away is recognized by not only by churches but other people as well in other fields.

Author of the book *Quiet* by Susan Cain told *Scientific American* this about solitude: “Solitude is a crucial and underrated ingredient for creativity . . . From Darwin to Picasso to Dr. Seuss, our greatest thinkers have often worked in solitude.”

Last week, I shared about the importance of creating space, for better or worse. But there are many ways to do that and I’ve learned definitions matter. When I say *create space for your soul* or *come away for a while*, there are many words and concepts that might come to mind for you as there are for me.

I wanted to list a few things that come to mind and how they may or may not be what I’m talking about when I say to create space for your soul to breathe:

The first three are kind of in that category. They are the coming away in a sense but maybe not the kind of invitation that I’m talking about here, but I’ll mention them because you may be thinking about one of them:

**1. Vacation** - Usually this is something that is scheduled, it has an agenda with either tickets, appointments or excursions. We’ve made plans for a long time, we bring family, or friends or whoever. It is a time to get away for recreation. How many times have we went away for a vacation and we come home exhausted? That’s not really what I’m talking about here in this invitation to come away for a while.

**2. Church Retreat** - I prefer to use the word Church Weekend actually because that word retreat can get wrapped up in all kinds of definitions so if you are thinking Church Weekend or Church time away these can be really beautiful times of connection and community but they’re also times when several people share a room, a speaker or several speakers. There is always an

agenda, some weird uncomfortable icebreakers and we usually stay up way too late, and we again come home tired.

That is one way to get away but that is not the coming away I'm talking about here.

**3. Break** - When my kids were small, that's what I called a trip to Target. I needed a break from the questions, the needs, the being on point-ness of being a young mom with young kids. Self-care is so important. But that is more like a spa or a massage or time alone in the car than a spiritual encounter with God.

Can a spiritual encounter happen in any of these three places, on a vacation, on a church weekend, or a break? Absolutely. Can you create space for your soul in these first three? Yes - though it may be difficult depending on the circumstance. But this is our regular life, it's where we live, and one of the reasons I created this podcast, actually is to offer ways to help you create space in regular life, including vacation with family, community with church members, and that much needed break you get in your car while running errands.

But then there's another kind of coming away, the kind we do on purpose with God. Here, I will list three.

**4. Sabbath** - This is the weekly part of the rhythm of life and we are invited to keep it. I talk more about that in episode 40: Keep Your Rest. It could be argued when we don't keep the sabbath weekly, our need for time away may come more quickly, but that is one way to come away with God weekly, regularly, part of our rhythm of life.

**5. Retreat** - Maybe more of the true sense of the word retreat, perhaps not the kind I mentioned earlier that we sometimes think about. This, we might do quarterly where we come away in solitude with God for a couple of days and may just twenty-four hours, but hopefully a couple of nights. If you want more information or guidance on what a true retreat might look like, check out Ruth Haley Barton's book, *Invitation to Retreat*. She talks about the importance of retreat and how to practice it in your actual life. In a podcast I heard, I'll link to it in the shownotes, it's a podcast with Renovare's, Nathan Foster, and she said she started this practice when her kids were seven, five, and she had a newborn. So, this is a time in her life when she began to come

away with God, really intentionally, but it wasn't fancy and it probably wasn't for super long periods of time.

**6. Sabbatical** - This is a longer span of time. This is something I mentioned earlier that John never quite got when we were in church. A leave from work, sometimes associated with education but also in the ministry like I mentioned before, given after 7 years of work a time of rest, renewal, sometimes study. I supposed it could be anything you want it to be as long as it's restful and fits with your lifestage.

I mentioned before that episode that I recorded last June for you called Keep Your Rest - that's episode 40 and in it, I asked the question mostly of myself, what's the difference between taking a break and keeping the Sabbath. I know one is out of necessity of circumstance and the other is a way of life.

I mentioned the fall of 2011 earlier and now I'll circle back around to it. During year 10 of John's 12 years as a youth pastor, his dad passed away. It was late July and immediately afterward, John didn't take a vacation, a break, or a retreat. Instead, he went straight back to work.

I've written about it and shared about it before so I won't go into all the details but I will say that the result of this deep grief coupled with his return to work so quickly, well his body started telling him he needed to come away for a while. The grief and loss had become too much too fast. And so he was forced to take some time off from work. That's what happens when we push our bodies past their capacity to: they begin to speak to us. May we have the wisdom to listen to them.

That's one reason why I'm such a believer in creating consistent space for your soul. It's available to each of us, and it doesn't depend on our planner. It depends on our heart and it might not take as much time as you think.

Dr. Swoboda has some beautiful things to say about living a sabbath keeping life, pointing out that rest is not something "that comes with getting our lives in order. Rest is something God finds on our behalf."

He mentions that nowhere in the Bible are we asked to create or make Sabbath. Instead, we protect it and enter into it. It's not something we make up, it's something we've been asked to take care of. We're invited to do that in any capacity that works for our season of life - God is always beckoning, always ready for us to come away. Not forever, just for a while.

Soul space is not an end in itself, it's not, but it is a way for us to place ourselves in the presence of God. And we can find him anywhere, even beneath the piles of busy, everyday life.

But sometimes we need something drastic. Something longer, something that will allow spacious places for deep work that can only happen in the silence.

As for me, July will be a time for me to come away for a while. I'll do some traveling at the beginning of the month but then it's home for reading, for listening, for being with my people after maybe the busiest two years of my life so far. My home needs my attention. I want to take longer walks around the neighborhood. My girls have 2 summers left at home after this one.

For many years, my self-appointed job description has been to help create space for your soul to breathe. Now, I've added to that so that you can discern your next right thing in love. And secretly in the back of my mind, I've tacked on a line from David Fitch's book, *Faithful Presence*, where he says, as we live together in Christ's kingdom and bring the world along.

That's kind of what I'm circling around this July is what does it mean to live together in Christ's Kingdom and what does it mean for me vocationally to bring the world along where I'm working hard to create space for your soul to breathe, where I'm longing to help you discern your next right thing in love. I'm also carrying the question what is my next right thing. I don't necessarily expect to come away with answers but I do hope to come away as more fully myself. In order to do my job with any amount of integrity, I also have to create that space for myself. So this will be our last episode until mid-August.

Until then, I hope you'll catch up on any episodes you missed or, bonus! You can grab the audio version of *The Next Right Thing* book if you haven't listened to it yet. I'll read it to you wherever you want - all you have to do is hit play and you can listen to me on fast speed and hear me talk like a crazy person if you want to.

More, though, I hope you'll find ways that make sense for you in this season of your life and in your own way to create a little space for your own soul to breathe whether that be 10 minutes in the morning, 10 hours on a weekend, or 10 days unplugged from all distractions.

Rather than tell you all the details of what I plan to do during my July Sabbatical, I will simply leave you with a few questions to consider for yourself:

Looking back, can you recall a time when you remember feeling like your soul had room to breathe?

Where were you then?

What circumstances surrounded that time in your life?

Looking around at your life today, what might be God inviting you to let go?

Is there something you need to take a break from? Is there a work you need to lay down? Is there a dream or idea that you need time to look in the face?

Looking ahead into the next 10 minutes, what is one way you can practice trusting Jesus today?

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Thanks for listening to Episode 88 of The Next Right Thing.

I'll be back at it in mid August but I may still be posting here and there on Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman.

Remember you can grab a copy of the audio version of *The Next Right Thing* on Amazon and I'll read it to you in my very own voice if you like that kind of thing. Of course, the hardcover is available wherever books are sold. I hope you will grab a copy for yourself, great poolside reading especially if you are in a time of transition or have a decision to make big or small. I wrote that book for you as an extension of this podcast and I hope what it does for you what the

creating of it did for me which was create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing in love.

I'll close with some words from Jan Johnson in her book, *Meeting God in Scripture*:

“Perhaps silence makes you uncomfortable. Gradually you may learn to welcome silence, understand that it is a time of great fertility and growth, not of emptiness. Silence cultivates vulnerability toward God, because silence is an outward form of an inward surrender.”

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