



## Episode 28: Stand On Your Head

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 28.

This is a podcast for anyone who struggles with decision fatigue and could use a simple reminder to do the next right thing. When I am in a season of transition, waiting, or general foginess, this is the best and most approachable advice I've ever received.

It's hard, though, to decide what to do *next* when we aren't even sure what we're doing *now*.

The weekly schedule, fatigue, and expectations all muddy up the water, not to mention the hidden heartache, longing, and fear that may be hanging out just beneath the surface.

All these things make it hard to see the current lay of the land.

Today, we continue this weekly practice of making room by letting go. We're in the middle of the season of Lent. Many people are talking about giving things up, the small obsessions that hijack our focus and the larger ones that keep us numb and disengaged.

It's a season of moderation and giving things up, and so I'll enter the conversation with a question. What does it mean to let things go?

What do we need to release today?

So, let's stop just for a few moments together so that we can, as Eugene Peterson says in his book, *The Jesus Way*, "be alert and attentive and receptive to what God is doing in and for us, in and for others, on the way. We wait for our souls to catch up with our bodies."

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Every morning when I wake up, I come downstairs and John already has the coffee made. I pour a cup and sit across from him at our small breakfast table and we usually have a quiet conversation before our kids get up about the day before and the one to come.

By now he's typically been up for at least an hour if not closer to two. If he had his choice, he would sleep until 6 like I do, but his body long ago decided a different rhythm for him and he's learned to make the best of it.

Years ago he said something in passing during one of these early morning conversations and it's a phrase I've not forgotten. "When I hold on to the wrong things," he said, "the wrong things hold on to me."

And so during these early morning times, before I come downstairs usually, he has already engaged in a simple, daily practice of letting go.

He's discovered that, given a few minutes of silence, it doesn't take long to identify something he's holding on to that has some kind of hold on him. And so, he names it, then he lets it go in the presence of God. In turn, room is made for him to receive something good, something lovely, something he might need to take his next right step.

I've tried this practice some myself and I agree with John: given a few moments of silence, I can always find something to let go of. This is a good practice for anyone who wants to become a soul minimalist - release what you no longer need. Make room to receive something good. By the way, I talked about the concept of soul minimalism in Episode 1 of this podcast so if you are new around here, that could be a good one to catch up on and a useful 14 minutes of your time.

One of the most unlikely practices that have helped me learn to release some things is by standing on my head. Not metaphorically, but actually, physically standing on my head.

I know a headstand isn't necessarily accessible or even recommended for everyone, but there are some simple practices for letting go that I've discovered with this practice that can be applied in lots of situations.

Honestly, I'm not that great at the headstand yet. I still have trouble keeping my balance

when I straighten my legs all the way up, I still need to practice near a wall in case I fall, and I still have work to remember to breathe when I'm upside down.

Even so, I've been delightfully surprised at the simple lessons I've learned while physically practicing this inversion. But the truth is we can practice standing on our head even if we never get upside down. It's all about perspective.

In my own personal practice of letting go this month, I'm realizing I need to let go of the version of myself who feels like she always has to be productive.

So here are 3 things the headstand is helping me to let go of in order to make room for something good.

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First, I'm learning to let go of my insistence that something has to change.

It may be impossible to change the room, but I can change myself *in the room*. This one seems most obvious of all so it's too bad I often miss it.

When the day seems like a waste, progress is invisible, and my circumstance looks all kinds of bad, it helps to acknowledge all of that in prayer, to whisper for help and expect to find it but to remember help may not come in the way I think it should. My circumstance most likely won't change. But that doesn't mean I can't.

Getting upside down is a daily reminder to look for Christ in the hidden places, the spaces where I might not usually think to look and to receive him as enough for me even in the midst of all this same old stuff.

In the smallest way, this letting go has made some room for courage.

It's scary to turn yourself upside down. Not only does the whole room around you look different, but your body may feel completely foreign at first. I've hardly moved out of this stage of my own practice so every time I get upside down, it feels strange and disorienting. But it's also empowering to access courage I know is already within me.

Changing myself in the room changes *me*, and so I continue even though I know I might lose my balance and fall. Falling is a necessary part of learning and courage grows each time you get back up. The room is the same but when I look at it upside down I see it differently and, in turn, I respond to it differently.

Second, standing on my head helps me let go of the serious face.

Quite simply, it's hard to take myself too seriously when I'm standing on my head. And I am a driven woman who desperately needs to remember to lighten up.

Sometimes all I need to uncomplicate my life is a good, long, delightful laugh. Lately, that laughter comes once I'm right side up again and think, *what on earth am I doing standing on my head?!*

Learning, that's what.

While the serious face expects me to perform and produce, laughter, as it turns out, makes room for the beginner in me to be welcomed and to not judged. Before you try to stand on your head, it's important to do the prep work.

I spent months in a gentle yoga class that I grew to dearly love, but sometimes I felt like I was wasting my time because we weren't doing any cool moves. (Miss the point of yoga much?) But that class was foundational and still is, maybe even the most important of all. You have to know how to properly stand on your feet before you can learn to stand on your head.

If I try to do too much too soon, I'll lose my balance.

If I try to prove myself, I miss the point.

It's important to pay attention to where you are without judgment. What we could accomplish yesterday might not be available to us today. This is not something to criticize ourselves for or to feel ashamed of or embarrassed over, rather let this be an opportunity to embrace humility and lean into our smallness instead of trying to run away from it. Lovely things happen when I stop denying my limits and instead, finally accept the place where I am.

I'm learning to value *practice* instead of pushing to *master*. These are very different words that bring vastly different experiences.

Finally, I'm learning to let go of obsessing over the future.

Whenever I practice headstands and the kids are around, they instinctively grow still and watch. It's playful enough to hold their interest but serious enough to keep them quiet. Somehow they understand that without my having to say. There's nothing like standing on your head to pull you and the people around you into this present moment. One wandering thought and down you go. How true that is in life in all kinds of ways.

This practice has made room for me to become who I am right now.

I didn't realize it until recently, but for years I've subconsciously believed that certain things are no longer accessible to me, certain kind of learning namely the kind I do in my own body. I thought those types were for someone younger, more fit, more brave, more *something* that I'm not.

As silly as it is to say, beginning to practice standing on my head brings me hope. While I'm learning to embrace the place where I uniquely am, I'm also aware that always there is something more to become, to learn, to try, and to practice. And this hope profoundly encourages me for the days to come.

So, what about you?

If your life was a house, what room feels most lacking to you right now?

Can you find a way to turn the room upside down and see something that may have been previously hidden to you?

Have you been taking yourself too seriously?

Has laughter happened around you but you've been too distracted to join in?

If so, refuse to feel shame about that. Instead, next time you hear them laugh, ask what's so funny and truly listen for the joy.

Maybe, you are having a hard time being here now because you're concerned about what is coming next?

Take a moment to whisper the day of the week, the month of the year. Be here, in this moment, just as you are.

And don't discount yourself.

No matter your age, your disabilities, your limitations real or perceived. You are exquisite.

You are still learning, still growing, still *becoming*.

Is there some wrong thing you are holding on to that has its hold on you?

What is one thing you can let go of today? In order to make room for something good.

What would it look like for you to practice being yourself?

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Thanks for listening to episode 28 of The Next Right Thing.

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, there are several ways to do that.

I post almost daily on Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman

To connect weekly stay right here and subscribe to the podcast if you haven't yet. For the month of March we are talking about things we can continue to let go of. As we make our way through this season of Lent I hope this theme will be an encouragement to you, especially if you have felt disconnected from the season or haven't had a chance to think much about the collective journey we are all on together toward Easter, toward renewal, and new life.

The good news is new life is available to you right now, even if you don't feel like you have time to remember it.

Hopefully, you know by now that we provide a transcript for each episode, so if you know someone who either can't hear or prefers reading to listening, you can download those transcripts at [thenextrightthingpodcast.com](http://thenextrightthingpodcast.com).

I'll leave you now with these words from Parker J. Palmer in his fantastic little book, *Let Your Life Speak*:

“What a long time it can take to become the person one has always been! How often in the process we mask ourselves in faces that are not our own. How much dissolving and shaking of ego we must endure before we discover our deep identity — the true self within every human being that is the seed of authentic vocation.”

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