



On Racism: Learning to Speak and to Listen

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. This is a podcast about making decisions but also about making a life and that couldn't be more relevant for today's episode. This will not be a typical episode of the podcast. I had one scheduled and ready to go. But about 12 hours before it was scheduled to drop, I realized releasing that episode today wasn't my next right thing.

I'll post it next week, but for today in this short episode, I want to say a few words about the heartbreak, the anger and the exhaustion happening in our country as a result of the systemic racism that we see all around us and within us. And then I want to stop saying words and continue the work of listening.

I'll be honest. My instinct along with a lot of other people, especially white people, is to ask, "What can I do?" My instinct is not to ask how have I contributed, but the more I listened to our Black brothers and sisters, the more this question comes to the surface. I keep hearing our black friends say, "Could you listen to us? Believe us. Learn our stories. Apologize to us."

At the invitation of Osheta Moore and other wise black men and women, my next right thing is to say, "I'm listening. I believe you. I'm learning. I'm sorry."

For the past 24 hours I've been with my family in the mountains. We needed to come away for a while to get quiet on the inside and to laugh at silly things. Sometimes laughter is the quickest way to a quiet heart and for me, a quiet heart is a necessary posture for sharper work and more generous creativity.

As my mind is clearer, I'm able to pay closer attention.

Guess what I didn't think about at all while we've been away. Being white. I didn't worry that we would be questioned about parking along the side of the road for a picnic. I didn't fear for my white son's life when he walked down the sidewalk all by himself. I didn't fear. I only rested.

This is not an apology for being white. This is an apology for our brothers and sisters who often live in fear because they are black.

During our weekend away, I didn't fear. I only rested. I want this to be true for everyone. And until it is, we have to keep listening. Keep learning. And keep talking about it. But there are healthy ways to talk and then there are unhealthy ways to talk. And there's a time to speak and there's a time to listen.

It's not the job of black people to educate us either on the blatant racism that we see in the news or the

nuanced kind that lurks around in our own hearts. Some black people have chosen to be teachers, to step into the complex and heartbreaking arena, to have the day in and day out conversations, to do the hard and holy work of education.

One of those people is Dr. Lucretia Berry, she talks about the importance of dialogue and how it is vastly different from debate or even discussion. I want to learn how to do that better and I humbly submit to her leadership.

Last week, I joined her community Brownicity. I'm happy to pay her to teach me and she'll teach you, too. I'm following her as well as her team's leadership through a fundamental understanding of how to practice transformative change in our spheres of influence. You can learn more at brownicity.com/learn.

I know this episode is short and it might seem disjointed, last minute and scattered, that's because it is all of those things. But if we wait to speak out until we feel polished and impressive, I fear we may be silent for far too long. I confess, that's been true for me. And so sometimes our next right thing is to stumble forward together, not because we know exactly what we're doing but for the sake of love and for justice.

May we hold our own responsibilities with the same care, reverence, and humility we ask for from our leaders.

May we use our voices to speak up and stand with even if we stand out.

May we not underestimate the power of an honest dialogue and a loosely-held agenda.

May we not be afraid to examine our own hearts in the presence of God.

May we see his image as it shines through the lives of our black brothers and sisters.

May we know when to speak up and when to stay silent.

When we are silent, may it be because we're learning and listening and not because we're afraid.

May it be so in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.