



Episode 37: Take A Hometown Tour

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 37.

If you're new to the podcast, I'm so glad you're here. I hope our time together will become a habit that you look forward to every Tuesday.

Each week I try to keep things fairly simple — every story, reflection, and prayer I share on Tuesday is meant to help clear the clutter and make a way for you to discern your next right thing.

With our full schedules and our daily concerns, not to mention the ever-ending decisions that we're always making, it's easy to feel overwhelmed with even the slightest disruption to our routine.

With that in mind, today's suggestion might seem counter-intuitive, in a way because I want to share how disrupting our routine can sometimes be exactly what we need to get unstuck.

Listen in.

When it comes to discovering what your next right thing might be, one thing that often helps me more than anything else is to force myself away from my house and into the world.

Seeing new places and unique people are all rich experiences, offering a different context my soul often longs for, especially as I'm trying to live a creative life. Leaving home helps wake us up, asks us to pay attention, and invites us to be open to transformation.

But if I depend on a big change of scenery as my main catalyst for rest, inspiration, or perspective, well I'm in danger of cultivating a sour mood towards my home.

It can be easy, for me anyway, to romanticize places other than home.

Not only that, the truth is I have a mixed relationship with traveling. I would actually love to travel if it wasn't for the *travel*. In the future, I will be the first person to download that teleportation app our children's children's children invent one day. No need for airplanes or long car rides!

The truth is we don't need to be in a different zip code in order to experience a meaningful vacation or a break from the daily grind.

If work, money, or lack of time is keeping you home this season, perhaps you can still discover a getaway for your soul without all the fuss by being a tourist in your own hometown.

Don't laugh, but two years ago when I saw that Jewel was coming to Greensboro, I bought tickets immediately and without hesitation. This was a bigger deal than you know.

I have not always been aware of the types of things I enjoy, and I have been less able to plan my own nights out. Call it a good girl thing, but I spent a good amount of high school and college Maggie Carpenter-ing my way through decisions — in case you haven't brushed up on your rom-coms in a while, that's Julia Robert's character in *Runaway Bride*. You remember her, she's the one who kept dating different guys and changing her personality to match them because she didn't really know who she was or what she wanted? She didn't just date them she actually was engaged to them and then she would leave them at the altar. (laugh) And then at the end, she did this whole thing with making all different kinds of eggs to see which kinds of eggs she liked?

Yeah...I get all of that.

Not the whole leaving men at the altar part. I've not done that. I mean I haven't ever left any men at the altar just to be clear. But I can relate to the part to the part about how she was not

always aware of what she wanted, of what she liked, or who she really was. Some of that is just part of growing up, I know, but I'm convinced that for some of us, knowing what we like and what we want is more difficult to discern than for others.

Back to Jewel her voice served as a soundtrack for my freshmen year of college and then a few years ago I read her memoir, *Never Broken*. Plus at that time, when she was coming to Greensboro, John and I were really into watching *Alaska the Last Frontier* each week and it is all about her family so of course, we decided to snag those tickets and make a night of it.

At the time, this did not feel smart. It was right before summer break, first of all, and to leave the house for 24 hours felt like a feat too impossible to bear.

But what's good for my soul is often opposed to what's good for my schedule - so for the sake of sanity, we made the plans and decided to make a day of it.

At the time, I didn't realize what a gift this day would be now, I look at the decision to stay close to home but pretend like we weren't as a kind of spiritual discipline of touring your own hometown. I've said it before but I believe anything can be a spiritual discipline when we recognize the presence of God with us in it.

That Jewel concert was, for me, a great excuse to get out and do something fun in our own town.

Whether you just moved to where you live now, or if you were born in the hospital down the street – the place where you live is part of who you are now. This place holds your story, at least a piece of it. This is the place where God wants to meet you, for better or worse.

One way to honor the place where you are is to tour it on purpose. And one result of doing that just might be a loosening of the grip you hold on your own schedule.

A lot of things came together for us that particular evening – good weather, great food, and lovely music – but most of all I think I enjoyed myself because we found the fun right here in Greensboro, where we live.

We checked in to a local hotel and set out on foot for the rest of the evening.

That part felt important, walking through our town. You see things that you miss just driving through, and spontaneously run into people you may not normally see.

We spent a little time browsing a local independent bookstore. We didn't buy anything this time (although last time I was there I snagged a signed copy of Natalie Goldberg's *The True Secret of Writing*).

Since I've got romantic comedies on the brain, this bookshop has a nice *Shop Around the Corner* vibe to it.

I had to hold myself back from twirling in the aisle and spelling F-O-X.

We sat outside to eat a slow dinner, ordered appetizers, entrees, *and* dessert. Is all that food essential to a great night out on a tour in your own hometown? No, but it sure was a nice treat.

Besides, we saved the money we would have spent traveling. I felt like that was a Win!

We waved as a former student passed by on Elm Street, then later chatted with one of the girls' middle school teachers that we spotted eating outside a restaurant. We stood in line at the Carolina Theatre with an old friend from church.

And can I just talk about Jewel for a hot minute? She opened the night with an a cappella version of *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* and then she stood there singing for two hours with the simple company of two guitars, an adorable dress, and a voice that could slay dragons and win wars.

It was a lovely night made lovelier by the fact that we were only 10 minutes from home. And to top the whole thing off, her encore was yodeling, one of my favorite things of all time. It is so weird and quirky and I love it so much, forever.

As we walked back to the hotel after 11 pm which is typically way past my bedtime, I tried to yodel the whole way. John put up with me and as we walked, I was deeply grateful for our city, where both beautiful things and a lot of hard things have happened.

But this is where we live and where our people live. We're learning to love this place and to receive what it has to offer. In turn, we're learning where we fit and finding our voice among her people.

In a way I can't explain, spending the evening together in our own hometown brought out the me in *me*. And I liked what I saw.

This little hometown tour was not especially convenient. It was not required, assigned, or something we could check off our to-do list.

It was somewhat of an inefficient way to get unstuck if you want to know the truth. But it softened my edges. It helped me slow down. It allowed me to see the gifts of my own place in the world. All of these things are surprisingly helpful when you have a big decision to make.

And so if the next few weeks hold some uncertainty for you maybe you're carrying a big decision around, facing a change of some kind, or trying to discern your next right thing, big or small, may you find a way to give yourself permission to be light and easy for a while.

Maybe you decide to take a little tour of your own hometown - it doesn't have to be an overnight gig - maybe it's just an evening ride with the windows down or a visit to a shop you always pass but never enter.

As we step through our own front door, may we have the kind of eyes that see things differently today?

As we hear the wind and the birds, the car horns, and the train whistles, may we receive their sounds as a gift, the melody of our hometown song?

Loosen us up. Open our grip. Help us be rooted, I pray.

Remind us that even as you are the God of Israel, you are the God of our own hometown, too.

Thanks for listening to episode 37 of The Next Right Thing.

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman and you can also find me over at emilypfreeman.com

As I've said before, it is an honor to help you create a little space for your soul to breathe each week — though this might sound ironic seeing as how I've been talking for several minutes, I do see my work as a ministry of listening. If nothing else, I hope our time together helps you listen to your own life with a bit more awareness and hope than you maybe would have otherwise done.

Some final words from a book I think you will recognize. A conversation between a young girl and a new friend.

"Tell me something about yourself and the country you came from," said the Scarecrow, when she had finished her dinner. So she told him all about Kansas, and how gray everything was there, and how the cyclone had carried her to the Land of Oz.

The Scarecrow listened carefully, and said, "I cannot understand why you should wish to leave this beautiful country and go back to the dry, gray place you call Kansas."

"That is because you have no brains" answered the girl. "No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home."