



## Episode 49: Collaborate

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 49.

If this is your first time listening in, you might not know that we've been on a short break from new episodes and I have to tell you I am so glad to be back! I've been counting down the days until it was time to record again which I guess is a pretty great sign that my break paid off.

Meanwhile, during the last few weeks, we passed a few more milestones on the podcast.

The first one? In the last episode, number 48, I mentioned how I would love to pass 1000 ratings on iTunes and thanks to you, we did it! We currently have 1,039 to be exact and this is a fantastic way to help support the podcast so thank you so very much for that.

The second milestone is *The Next Right Thing* turned one! Last month marked our one year anniversary and I have done exactly nothing to celebrate because I'm in grad school and all my extra energy is saved for article reading and paper writing. So this will have to suffice for our celebration. YAY!

But enough about this podcast, let's talk about *you*. Last week I asked on an Instagram story what is the most difficult part of decision making for you? (By the way, if you are interested

in connecting beyond the podcast, Instagram is the most fun way to do that. You can find me @emilypfreeman.

So I asked that question about decision making and literally hundreds and hundreds of you answered and your responses were so insightful, and honest, and most of all completely relatable.

Rather than summarize all your answers here because that will take forever. I'll just say that your answers confirmed what I was already fairly sure of: decisions are hard and we want to make good ones.

We don't want to hurt people with our yeses and our nos. We want to move forward with confidence. We don't want fear to boss us around. We don't want to procrastinate and put off the decision because we don't know what to do. We don't want to live with regret. We want to move to the rhythm of the heartbeat of God. But what is his heartbeat in this and how can we know?

The complete answer to that is bigger than we can tackle in one short episode, but for today, I'll speak to it the best I can. Listen in.

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About a month ago, I sat in a green and white striped chair in St. James Park. I was there to co-lead a trip through London with my friend Tsh Oxenreider. Her role was to do the heavy lifting - she planned the itinerary, booked the guest house, and basically led us through a foreign country and kept us alive.

My role among our small group of eight was simply to make sure we didn't miss anything — to hold space for God and for one another. We processed new lands together, both the ones we toured in England and the ones we encountered within.

So there for a few moments, before our conversation started that afternoon in the park, I thought about what it took to get us here, gathered in a circle in the lawn in England on a cool day in July.

Almost exactly 18 months before this moment in the park, I got a message from Tsh. I remember exactly where I was, I was looking out the window of our upstairs bedroom, I listened while she pitched an idea to me that seemed crazy at first but that's also what made it exciting. Because if there's one thing I've learned over the last decade of writing about faith and creativity, it's that all good ideas almost always start out sounding a little bit crazy.

In that message, she explained that for years she has wanted to lead a group through her favorite big city on earth, and that's saying something since she is an actual world traveler. You can check out her travel memoir, *At Home in the World*, if you want to know more about that.

This idea was growing in her to lead a group of people to a particular place in a thoughtful and intentional way. Like a lot of big creative ideas, she had been wanting to do this for a pretty long time.

As I listened to her talk, I could feel my heart rate speed up in excitement, curious about her idea, what it could look like, and how I might be a part of it.

She shared how she had recently told a friend of hers about her idea to lead a trip but she was afraid of the logistics part and she was also unsure about how to make it meaningful for the attendees. That's when her friend suggested she, Tsh, partner up with someone else. And that's when she wondered if that someone else might be me.

I want to stand on the table and slow clap applaud Tsh for sending me this message that day in early 2017 because she did something brave that I'm not sure I would have had the courage to do.

First, she honestly admitted something she really wanted to do and then? She reached out a collaborative invitation to see if I might want to do it, too.

Making the decision to move forward with an idea is hard enough, but one thing that can keep us feeling especially stuck is trying to move forward with a decision alone because we are afraid.

When it comes to collaboration it takes a certain amount of courage to say yes to an invitation. But it takes courage in even greater measure to extend the invitation in the first place.

In that moment there in the park, waiting for my friends to grab their lunches, anticipating our conversation, holding my agenda with an open hand and not knowing where it might lead, I realized the role that I had on that trip to London, the one Tsh had invited me to be a part of eighteen months before, well my role felt like the most natural in the world to me. Though I've never named it this way or had it be a part of my job in any official capacity, holding space and naming unnamed things is, in fact, my actual jam.

But I wonder how long it would have taken me to realize this fully if Tsh had never extended the invitation or if I had not been willing to say yes?

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One of my greatest takeaways from this entire experience beyond all of the wonderful things we saw and did in London, was the realization of how important it is for me to say yes to collaboration to be willing to jump in and see what happens, to move toward people rather than away, and to believe that we really are better together than we are apart.

Not only that, I want to be the kind of person people want to collaborate with so that when I work up the courage to finally extend that invitation, the person on the other end will gladly come sit at my table.

If you sense it might be time to move forward in a decision and you think collaboration might be a key component, I've come up with some descriptors of the kind of person to look for and, in turn, the kind of person to become. I call her a wholehearted creative and here's what she does differently:

### **1. She sees limits as opportunities.**

She's put excuses aside. She understands her real life, her real budget, and her real amount of time is not keeping her from her creative work. Whole-hearted creative women know our limits can be gifts if we let them be. We simply have to do what we do best: receive the gift of the present moment with all of its limits and potentials and be creative with what we have.

## **2. She integrates her creative work into every part of her life.**

Because she has to. She is not just one thing. Wholehearted creativity means embracing our whole lives, refusing to compartmentalize. We bring our creative selves to each situation, open and ready and generous.

## **3. She believes there is enough to go around.**

Other people's success does not freak her out. She doesn't hide behind comparison or excuses. Instead, she champions the work of others and hands out her support with grace and compassion.

## **4. She knows her art is the evidence, not the goal.**

Art is not simply the work of her hands. Her truest artistic work is *being fully herself in the presence of others*. The book, the painting, the meal, the presentation are all simply evidence of a deeper art happening within the soul of the artist. Because art is what happens when we dare to be who we really are.

Whatever comes out as a result of that – whether you teach, sing, build, write, love, help, or calculate; if you cook, parent, lead, clean, organize, or listen, well the way you do those things as yourself is evidence of a person who has come fully alive.

## **5. She doesn't wait to feel qualified.**

When she's tempted to think maybe she got this whole calling thing wrong, she remembers that catchy phrase Mark Batterson said, that "God doesn't call the qualified, he qualifies the

called.” She remembers Moses, Esther, David, Mary and Joseph. *Oh yeah*, she says to herself. *I am equipped because God is with me.*

## **6. She no longer fears the silence.**

She has made her peace with the silence she sometimes hears when she asks what is next. She trusts the inspiration will always circle back around again. She listens in the darkness and creates her way through it because sometimes that’s the only way out.

## **7. She understands the soul and the schedule don’t follow the same rules.**

The days of trying to force her soul to sync up nicely with her schedule? Those days are past. Now she understands the deep work happening in her soul cannot be rushed, it cannot be simplified or systemized. That is not her job. Instead, her job is to pay attention. She listens to the gentle heartbeat of her own life. She refuses to try to force clarity out into the open before it’s time.

## **8. She knows she’s an artist.**

Though we may not all be artists by profession, we are most certainly artists by design. She accepts her birthright with a humble confidence. She is made in the image of a creative God and this means she has a job to do. Her job is to show up in the world with her whole heart and do her next right thing in love.

I want to continue to be intentional with people – to learn from, to work beside, and to champion their work. I also want to, I hope, walk in my own wholehearted creativity and not be afraid to collaborate.

I want to invite you to take a moment and consider a few questions for yourself.

Am I afraid of or do I love collaboration?

When is the last time a collaborative hand was extended towards me?

What was my response?

When is the last time I asked someone else to join me?

How did they respond?

Do I trust God to keep me safe when I partner with others?

Do I believe he will bring the right people along when I need them?

Do I know that my own identity is not dependent upon whether or not I am invited, or whether or not those I invite receive me, but that it is sure and strong in Christ no matter what happens next?

The way to move to the rhythm of the heartbeat of God looks more like joy than fear, more like love than comparison, more like collaboration than competition, more like *together* than *apart*.

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Thanks for listening to episode 49 of The Next Right Thing.

You may have heard Tsh and I talk about this trip to London on her podcast, *Simple*. If you're interested it's a fairly short conversation and I'll link to it in the show notes.

A quick note for any writers listening who may be looking for some fellow writers to link arms with. Many of you already know I'm the co-founder of hope\*writers, an online community of working writers dedicated to the success and creativity of each member. We help smart creative writers do their work forever without losing their minds today. We open our doors a few times a year and this is just a quick note to let you know our fall enrollment will open up on September 10<sup>th</sup> — so mark your calendar for that if you are interested or if you know someone that is interested! You can, of course, learn more and add your email to the waiting list so you will know when the doors open at [hopewriters.com](http://hopewriters.com)

Y'all I'm thrilled to be back here talking with you. This podcast has been one of the most surprising gifts of the last year for me in my life and in my work and I am grateful you have received it with open arms and enthusiasm.

As always, thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.