



Episode 58: Welcome Silence

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 58.

This is a place for anyone struggling with decision fatigue of any kind and for any reason whether you are chronically hesitant, prone to indecision, or if you simply have a thousand tiny things on your mind right now, clamoring for your attention.

If you feel like you're spinning your wheels, unable to focus on one thing at a time, worn out from all the choices, big or small. If your time and energy are limited, you constantly compare your decisions to other people's and wonder if you're choosing right, may today's episode be a chance for you to pause, to listen, to befriend silence for a change.

It's an honor to help create a little space for your soul to breathe so you can discern your next right thing in love.

In the autumn of 2012 singer, John Mayer had surgery on his vocal cords. He was ordered not to speak for two months or sing for six. Here's what he wrote at the onset of his two months of silence:

“Well, here I am. Silent for the next few months, no singing for probably six, but all signs point to this being the last step in getting to perform again. I'll try and post more, but I've gotten really good at keeping my thoughts to myself and I don't exactly see anybody starving for my take on things. But it might be fun to offer some kind of window into this very odd and slightly beautiful time.” – John Mayer, on his Tumblr page

Now, eventually he was able to return to the work he loved, but first, he had to heal. And for that, he literally had to be quiet. A period in his life which he referred to as a “very odd and slightly beautiful time.”

Healing, in his case, required him to do the opposite of the thing he was best at, the thing he made a living by, and became famous for healing required him not only to stop singing but to stop *talking*. Not forever, just for a time.

In order to do the thing he loved, he had to embrace something that didn't come natural. He had to welcome silence.

When I take a step back, I would say welcoming silence is probably more valuable for us than we realize even if we're not singers with injured vocal cords.

When our son was just four years old, he got his tonsils out and I sat next to him all night at the hospital, the IV dripping consistent next to his bed. There was no rushing there. For nearly 10 hours, I sat in that chair while he watched cartoons, ate Jell-O and clutched a stuffed green frog all the young patients got when they checked in. He had all the necessary tools for healing.

And since I'm always connecting the dots, even though it's been years since that night in the hospital with him. I remember how I thought about the way our souls are so like our bodies. They need time and space to heal too. While the wounds of the soul aren't quite as apparent as the wounds of the body, well they can be just as, if not more, painful.

The world we live in doesn't cater to healing. It all spins way too fast and we spin right along with it. Bodies need time while the world wants *on time*, and the need for healing gets lost under the assembly line conveyor belt of life.

But when you think about it, most healing requires a period of hushed silence. It's why we don't use bullhorns in hospital hallways, why we don't shout in nurseries filled with newly growing babies, why we don't tell loud jokes at funerals.

These people are healing, growing, grieving, and silence is a necessary companion on all these journeys. Like a toddler refusing a bedtime, we don't always like this imposed silence. But what if, instead of pushing it away, we welcomed the silence needed for healing and for health?

Might this be your next right thing?

Maybe that sounds strange. Maybe for you, silence is not something you welcome, but something you turn from, something you dread, or even fear.

Maybe you've been on the receiving end of an angry silent treatment and you can't imagine a lack of words or a lack of information to be anything but bad.

Maybe silence is not a welcoming word to you because you have been tossed aside, overlooked, sidelined, or pushed around in your life. Maybe you have been silenced and you cannot possibly see the good side.

Maybe as you've talked with God over the years, you've been met with silence more times than you can count.

What might it take for you to learn to welcome the kind of silence that is a friend to the hurting, a comfort for the needy, a dependable presence in the unshakable kingdom of God?

Even when we welcome silence on purpose, well it doesn't always go the way we think.

When we make space for God, it seems like things should take a truly spiritual turn. But that's not usually how it turns out.

In his book, *Shattered Dreams*, Larry Crabb makes an important observation about God and about silence. He says this:

"I've often done all I know to do to create space for God. I've spent time in prayer I thought was contemplative, I've said no to lesser desires to make room for rich fulfillment, I've knelt before God with the bread and wine . . . and for all my effort, I've felt only increased emptiness. Frustration. Silence. I created space for God and He didn't fill it. Or did He, in ways I failed to

recognize because I was expecting something else? Or didn't He, because I was arrogantly working hard, thinking He would be impressed and compelled to show up?"

That's what Larry Crabb said about God and silence, but I can relate, in fact, my own arrogance shows up here.

There have been times, and they have been many, where I've become quiet on purpose in order to have God show up in a way I could not only understand but also maybe explain and, if I'm honest, even control.

I waited for a God I could manage and he reveals himself to be unmanageable. In fact, even as I say that out loud, I realize how much I hate the concept of God "showing up" anyway. Like there is a place in the world where he isn't and for reasons beyond my understanding, he one day decides to finally *show up* there.

No, God is I AM. He doesn't show up, HE IS.

He may reveal Himself to me in the stillness and the hush, or he may not.

Still, there is something to this silence. Talking about John Mayer and his healing, I know his need is physical, but I still haven't been able to shake my curiosity over the connection between healing and quietness. Stillness and Listening. For the Body and for the Soul.

I'm outside and the faraway jet moves closer. I stop what I'm doing, look up into the cool autumn sky. I'm careless, though, and instead, I gaze straight into the sun, white turns green against my eyelids.

The jet is over my head, I can tell by the heavy loudness in the air. This time I cup my hand at my eyebrows and look up again. Too many trees block the way and the jet sounds change from coming to going.

I realize I'm missing it.

But am I really? It's not like I've never seen a jet before. Why am I still so compelled to look up, and drop everything just to find the source of the growling roar I've heard a million times before.

The louder the sound, the more instinctual my attention.

How many times have we run from inside the house when we hear a helicopter overhead to outside to the front yard to just see it with our own eyes. There it is, we say. Like we've never seen a helicopter before.

Meanwhile, cloaked in quietness, a vine climbs high, inches her way across the white picket fence in our backyard. These introverted buds whisper their growing secrets only to those who stop to listen. I'm missing it. This time, it's true.

The urgent bursts into the room, dramatic and demanding.

The quiet things the sometimes more important things whisper, steady and waiting.

I have a lot to learn about what to pay attention to. And so our weeks are filled with mostly good things. But there is stillness of soul and a quietness of heart I long to continue to learn.

There is a time to speak and there is a time to keep silence.

I'm learning this new rhythm of listening.

As it turns out there's lots I'd like to say about silence. I won't cram it all in to one episode because that feels like it defeats the whole point.

What I will do is invite you into a time of personal silence here with me. Here's how it will work.

If you are someone for whom silence is difficult or you can't imagine sitting still in silence for any period of time OR if you are a person for whom silence sounds wonderful but you never seem able find it well, I'm going to make it easy.

You are already listening to this episode. Already committed to the few minutes we have together.

So, let's take just one of those minutes today to pause on purpose, to create some space together.

I'll watch the clock and I promise you I won't keep you longer than one full minute.

And listen I will even give you music for the minute so it's not even technically silence. But it is space and it's a baby step. I hope you'll receive it as a gift.

Here's what this silence is not for: you are not to make a list, make a plan, present an agenda, or rattle off requests. There is a time for those things, but this is not that time. Instead, as you hold your own decisions, as you consider your next right thing, let this be a chance for you to simply be a person, to become a soul minimalist again grounded in this moment right here.

I'll read you a sending thought as you sit for one minute and then we'll meet on the other side.

Are you ready?

May God come alongside you in the silence, weighty and strong, head bowed next to you with respect, ready to sit for a moment. May you not demand an answer but be content with his presence, listening to his heart of love.

God, the one and only—

I'll wait as long as he says.

Everything I hope for comes from him,

so why not?

He's solid rock under my feet,

breathing room for my soul,

An impregnable castle:

I'm set for life.

Psalm 62:5-6 The Message

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Thanks for listening to episode 58 of The Next Right Thing.

Last week I invited you to use the hashtag #mynextrightthing on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter and tell us how you're taking this next right thing mindset into your everyday life.

It was so fun. I loved seeing your images and reading your stories and would love to continue that. Two of my favorites from the hashtag this week — one from @windyjamesstarnes who shared she was just 13 school days away from retirement and her next right thing was to do report cards - Congratulations, Windy, as you discover what your *next* next right thing might be.

And to Emily @everydaybeautyco who shared how much she was dreading finishing up her taxes for this year but after listening to last weeks episode, she decided that was her next right thing and in about an hour, she was done. Way to go, Emily!

That's one thing last week's episode Episode 57 did for people, Don't Dread Your Weird Life, it helped people take some action and just do their next right thing. Is welcoming silence your next right thing this week? If not, what might it be? If you want to share it with us, you can tag me @emilypfreeman and use the hashtag #mynextrightthing — I'd love to see what your next right thing is today.

But listen even if you don't share your next right thing with anyone at all, I hope you'll consider the gift silence can be for you as you discern your next right thing.

Some final words from a book called *Sharing Silence*:

“When we make room for silence, we make room for ourselves. Silence invites the unknown, the untamed, the wild, the shy, the unfathomable – that which rarely has a chance to surface within us.”

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