



## Episode 60: Start Before You're Ready

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 60.

C.S. Lewis says, "Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment 'as unto the Lord.' It is only our daily bread that we are encouraged to ask for. The present is the only time in which any duty can be done or any grace received."

I'm here to help create space for your soul to breathe so that you can first receive that daily grace in your own life and then make decisions from that centered place of love.

Even as we become people who *hold our long-term plans lightly*, we may also be standing on tiptoe, gazing into the unknown year ahead. Perhaps for you the coming months will bring a project you're planning to start, maybe a group you're prepping to lead, or a new idea you've decided needs some attention.

In today's episode I want to share why it's important to start before you're ready, to move even when you're not sure where you're going, and how doing the next right thing in love plays a part. I'll do that by sharing a story from my own life and, in the process, offering what I hope will be as fun an announcement for you to hear as it is for me to give.

Listen in.

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Starting is hard especially when there's no template, no how-to guide, and no guarantee the thing you're starting will actually work.

If only the work of art would come in outline form, predictable and linear, then the creative process would be much less grueling. But maybe it would be less satisfying and require zero transformation or faith on our part.

If ever there was a time to practice the spiritual discipline of doing the next right thing it's when you have a new idea. Wherever you are in the midst of your own creation, perhaps these heartfelt points will be of some encouragement to you if you are waiting for a stubborn project to take shape.

This might get a bit meta because I'll actually going to be sharing the story of this podcast. But my goal is always to be relentlessly helpful in service to you, so really this is an episode about how creative ideas work and how we often have to move forward with them even when we don't know what we're doing.

I've got eight tips and here's the first:

### 1. Remain open even if the timing is off. (And the timing is almost always off.)

Understand the nature of creative work means that you can't necessarily control when your ideas might come.

You can save them, you can steward them, and even tell them no, but you cannot keep them from showing up at your doorstep just because you might be taking a break for example.

When the idea started to take shape in my mind to develop content around this idea of doing the next right thing, I wasn't looking for a new idea.

It was around the time my last book, *Simply Tuesday*, was released in the fall of 2015 and that marked the end of six full years of the book proposal pitching, writing, editing, revising, launching, and book promoting cycle that I had worked through four times over.

I welcomed the end of that season with imaginary flowers and dancing and confetti and the joy of the light of a thousand suns.

I exaggerate a little bit. It was lovely work, and I'm grateful for my work. But I also was grateful for the break, I was somewhat desperate in fact for a break from that type of writing, long-form and I couldn't wait to work on whatever I wanted. Or nothing at all.

But in the meantime, I kept circling this idea of decision-making. I was fascinated how unmade decisions had a lot of power to form me, for better or for worse.

As a writer, I assumed this idea was my next book idea. But every time I sat to try to write about it, the words felt stuck and wouldn't come. Meanwhile, on the side and unrelated, I became smitten with the audio format.

And so the number one tip to start before you're ready is to remain open even if the timing is off.

2. Don't expect your ideas to explain themselves. That's not their job.

So I had this idea I thought was a book, but it kept not wanting to be that for whatever reason which I did not understand.

I tried to approach it the way I approached the books I'd written before and it kept not responding.

I don't know any other way to say this but I trust you're gonna get it. Because you're smart and you're creative and maybe you've been listening to this podcast long enough that you know how my brain works.

New ideas start out like tiny gremlins. That's the word I use in my head, even though when I look up "gremlin" it's defined as imaginary mischievous sprite regarded as responsible for an unexplained problem or fault, especially a mechanical or electrical one.

Actually, that's probably exactly the right word.

Gremlins. Idea gremlins show up and disrupt without explanation. If you try to figure them out before it's time, you'll end up frustrated.

Instead, let them come. Let them dance. Let them turn over some tables in your mind. See what they have to say without demanding they have a reason. Try not to get too fussy about it.

I had an idea I thought was a good one - exploring the way God wants to meet us through the process of making decisions. But I kept expecting that idea to explain itself.

Why aren't you coming out as a book like I expected!? And why am I so enamored with audio? What is happening?

The idea gremlins aren't the problem. Don't blame them. Our expectation that the gremlins come with clarity is the real problem. Ideas come, but their job is not to explain themselves. Instead of forcing an explanation, receive them for what they are and turn to your Father to sort them out alongside you.

That's tip number two.

### 3. Understand that clarity cannot be rushed.

I have an entire episode maybe you've already heard it, dedicated to this topic it's episode 27 if you want to go back and listen. This is a quote from Marie Forleo and ever since I heard her say it, I repeat it to myself on the daily.

“Clarity cannot be rushed.”

I am guilty of clarity worship and I don't think I'm alone.

An inability to express an idea or experience does not render it meaningless. It simply means I need more time. I go through seasons of forgetting this, but I always come back around to believing it again.

Still for me, in this particular story I'm telling about this podcast, when Christmas of 2015 came and went and we moved into late spring and I still wasn't working on anything specific as it related

to this decision making idea or this audio format but didn't know what to do with either one of them, my patient listening posture slowly began to morph into a frustrated tapping posture.

As I paid attention to what was resonating within me, audio came up again and again. That was the type of work I was consuming, I was listening to more audiobooks. I was listening to more podcast. But when it came to the work I wanted to create, I just didn't know what to do with it.

Obviously, I thought of starting a podcast. It wasn't like that didn't come up in my mind. But the hurdles to doing that felt large and anyway, what would I do, interviews? None of it made sense in my head and nothing felt quite right.

Clarity cannot be rushed. That's tip number three.

#### 4. Create a small version.

If you don't feel ready to jump in big, one solution is to jump in small.

If you want to write a book, try writing one scene and see how it sits.

If you want to write a curriculum, gather a group of people for one night at your house to talk about the subject you want to teach.

Do it small and do it soon.

Some may call this *validating your idea*. That's formal, though. Instead, I just call it Try Something While The Risk Is Low To See If You Like It And If The People Get It.

And so while my crush grew on the audio format combined with my forever mantra to help create space for the soul to breathe, I realized I just needed to move already.

And this is where it might seem like I'm contradicting myself. Because while it's true that clarity cannot be rushed, it is also true that it doesn't mean we have to wait for clarity before we move.

In fact, any meaning full work I've created has almost always started out in fog. The clarity can't be rushed, so sometimes it means we have to move without it.

Let the clarity come when it comes. Meanwhile, get to work.

Here is where self-awareness is key. Here is where we need to develop our creative instinct and spiritual intuition, which is why paying attention to our inner life is so very important.

Are you waiting in a sacred pause or in a scared pause? Just one letter makes a lot of difference.

As for me, this is what I decided to do at that time with what I knew. I created a few different small audio devotional series that had a beginning and an ending. It wasn't a podcast, just a short offering to see if I liked it. As it turned out I enjoyed the work and it took some of the fear of the format away. I created one offering that was a seven day audio series called Still Moments and another one called The Quiet Collection.

If you have an idea and you don't feel ready, create a small version and see how it sits both with you and among the people for whom you're making it.

That's tip number four.

## 5. Talk it out and take good notes.

This is essential. If you want to start a project that has no name, no structure, no package and is basically invisible except inside your head, it's imperative to get you talking and for you to listen to feedback.

(And all the verbal processors say *duh!*) But for those of us who tend to process on the inside of our heads, talking it out doesn't always occur to us and so I have to make that an important point.

As I mentioned before, my way of creating a small version came in the form of two audio collections. Still, I had a sense there was more. For over a year, I talked myself sick about this audio idea.

I talked with my husband John, with my boss lady bestie Kendra, with my sister, my business partner Brian, and my Dad who, as a DJ for thirty years, knew a little something of audio.

I also did a lot of listening, to what they all said of course and also to what many of you said. Thousands of you signed up for my seven day audio series even though it was straight up homemade and a little bit janky. I received kind emails from many who many told me *The Quiet Collection* was rich and transformational for them.

If you have a project and starting feels too hard, here's what you do — talk before you're ready.

Pick someone who knows you well and also understands your work and tell them what you're thinking even if it doesn't make any sense. And then take good notes when they talk back.

That's number five.

## 6. Let the work tell you what it wants to be.

This is the most frustrating point of all.

I'm rolling my eyes at myself on your behalf. But here's the thing - a lot of the time the reason why we don't feel ready to start is because we compare this time to something we've done in the past and say, *But this feels different! I don't feel as confident, prepared, or courageous this time!*

That may be true. What also may be true is the reason you feel different this time is because this time is different.

This work is different. This idea is new. You have not been here before. Stop demanding the idea be what you think it should and start listening to what it's trying to tell you.

As I tried to approach my own idea the way I always had — as a book — it only came in fits and starts. It didn't feel the same as the book ideas I've had in the past. It felt just as alive within me as the others did, but it wasn't coming out in the same way.

Finally, after holding this idea for years, after a long time trying to wrestle it into a book format, I finally made peace with what this idea wanted to be. It didn't want to be written, it wanted to be spoken.

Let the work tell you what it wants to be. And when it speaks, *believe it*. That leads us to a seventh point.

## 7. Creativity comes first. Everything else will follow.

Let me tell you what I knew how to do: write.

Let me tell you what I didn't know how to do: create a podcast.

If your project involves some sort of learning for me a podcast involved a ton of technology, and all kind of other stuff that I didn't know at the time, resist the urge to try and learn the tech stuff first.

Instead, you have to fall in love with your idea. B.J. Novak calls this the *blue sky* period, where all ideas are considered good ones and nothing is off the table. That's what I've started calling it, too.

Now I realized this idea wanted to be a podcast, I brainstormed episode ideas, played around with segments, imagined how I wanted a listener to feel during and after listening, and spent hours looking for the right music. I did all that before I technically knew how to create a podcast.

When the technology became overwhelming, I had already done too much ground work to quit. In short, I was far too committed to the creative part of this idea to abandon it simply because the technical steps were too difficult.

Know the beauty of what you want to offer first and that will carry you through the dark alley of learning the technology or the necessary steps to getting it done.

That brings us to our eighth and final step toward starting before you're ready. Can you guess? Say it with me now:

## 8. Do the next right thing in love.

Of course, you know this one.

This has been my mantra for the past few years. Maybe it's become yours, too. I hope so. Do the next right thing that makes sense.

Do it with Jesus. Do it in love.

Sometimes that will look like nothing, like waiting like listening in the dark and tapping your foot.

Eventually, though, it will look like a deadline and doing the tiniest next right thing you know to do that will move you one step forward to that deadline. It's both gentle and brutal, patient and relentless.

When it's time to move, move. Don't wait for permission. Quiet the critic, celebrate your baby steps, and be okay with what you don't yet know. Trust it will come in time.

Here are those words from CS Lewis again: "Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment 'as to the Lord.'"

Want to hear a plot twist?

As I've been doing my next right thing creating these podcast episodes for you each week for over a year, I haven't had a long-term plan. I didn't when I started and I still don't now. But do you know what the work has led to as I've simply done my next right thing?

Y'all. It led to a book after all.

All that time I thought this idea was a book and it turned out to be a podcast. And I was right! But guess what?

Over time, this podcast started to whisper something else to me and do you know what it said?

Okay, now I'm ready to be a book. Well, alright then.

I promised a big announcement and here it is: I've written a book for us after all.

This work told me what it wanted to be. I wanted to be spoken, so I spoke it. And now it's ready to be written down.

In fact, it's already been written down and it's called *The Next Right Thing* and it's coming out in April.

When you start before you're ready, you never know where things might lead.

There's more to this story, of course. More that has happened, other ideas that have rooted, budded, and bloomed.

I hope I've shared enough to help you take your own next right step toward that project you want to work on even if you don't quite know what you're doing.

As we work to bring forth our own creative work into the world, my prayer for us is that we would be able to discern the difference between sacred waiting and scared waiting.

On the outside they may look the same, but we'll trust God to show us the difference.

As you continue to ask for your daily bread, as you dare to move before you're ready, may you find the courage to create small versions, to stop rushing clarity, to let your ideas tell you what they want to be as you simply do your next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 60 of *The Next Right Thing*.

I've been keeping this news to myself for about six months now mainly because there hasn't been time to think about how in the world to share it. A few weeks ago I finally told the members of hope\*writers as they helped me pick the cover and then last week I finally sent an email to those on

my email list as I always promise them first word news - ps if you want to get in on that, just visit [emilypfreeman.com/letter](http://emilypfreeman.com/letter) and you will too receive first word news. You can also sign up in the show notes of this episode.

Now listen, just because I wrote a book for us about The Next Right Thing the podcast isn't going anywhere. So, those of you that love the audio format, you'll still find me here every Tuesday morning.

Now that the news of The Next Right Thing book is finally out, you can of course, give your future self a gift and pre-order The Next Right Thing today. If nothing else, go to amazon so you can see the cover.

You are a grown up and know how the Internet works so if you're going to pre-order a book, you know where to go - [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com), Barnes and noble. Com, or wherever books are sold.

What you might not know is how helpful pre-orders are for authors. Those early numbers help to determine how many books are printed, how many copies are purchased by bookstores, and other more technical things I don't know enough about to explain.

If you wish you had a printed record of some of the things we've explored here, if you know friends or relatives who could benefit from this next right thing mindset we've developed but they don't even know what a podcast is, well I hope you'll order a copy of the book. Some of the content will be familiar, some of it will be new — as a whole, it will remain a simple, soulful practice for making life decisions that you can hold in your hands and I can hardly wait.

Again, it releases the first week of April - April 2<sup>nd</sup>. I'll have more to say about how you can help spread the word in the new year, but for now I just wanted to finally share the news with you and most of all, to say my most heartfelt thank you. If it weren't for you subscribing to and listening to this podcast, there wouldn't be a book at all. I wouldn't have had the opportunity to let this spoken offering live long enough to discover that it did want to be written down. So I want to offer a heart felt thank you again for your encouragement, your reviews, all that is so helpful. It's allowed me to continue to do this work.

Well, I've already quoted him twice in this episode, so it seems only fitting to finish it out by sharing this C. S. Lewis quote one more time. "Happy work is best done by the man who takes his long-term plans somewhat lightly and works from moment to moment 'as to the Lord.' It is only our daily bread that we are encouraged to ask for. The present is the only time in which any duty can be done or any grace received."

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