



## Episode 64: Acknowledge Your Soul

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 64.

I'm all about helping create space for your soul to breathe so you can do your next right thing in love and it's an honor to join you each week here, offering a nod of understanding to those of you who, like me, struggle with decision fatigue, especially these days. This will be our last episode of 2018 so I'll have a few announcements and thank you's at the end - but for now, it's almost Christmas.

In His book, *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard points out that

“It is not reasonable to think the soul would be properly cared for when it isn't even seriously acknowledged.”

One thing that can get lost during the bustle of the season is our very own soul who we are at the core, what we most deeply care about and long for. We don't want to wait until the other side of Christmas to finally pause and say, “Oh, hello soul. I've missed you this month”. No, instead, we work to create that space now, in the midst of the planning, the gathering, the list-making and pie baking, the gift wrapping and Advent waiting.

For a few minutes today, we'll make room, we'll take a moment to acknowledge our soul and remember the miracle of God With Us.

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The stage was empty but for two chairs, a manger and a Christmas tree, the fake kind with colored lights and a skinny, metal trunk. My entertainment expectations ran unusually high as I remembered that the actors were barely as old as the baking soda in the back of my fridge; way too old for baking soda, not so old for people.

They filed out onto the stage, looking wide-eyed into the crowd of grown-ups and camera flashes. All the nativity characters were accounted for: a too-tall-for-her-age Mary; a small, red-headed Joseph; a donkey who walked on his hind legs. There were angels and sheep and an inn keeper (the only one with actual lines). There were also 3 wise men which was proof that the play coordinators don't care so much about historical accuracy as they do about every kid in preschool having a part.

As chaotic as it was, I felt myself relax and watch the story as told through these little ones.

Of course, the tears came as they almost always do when I watch any kids on stage. It doesn't matter if they're mine or not, it only matters that they're small, they're innocent, and they're learning.

What are they thinking about this whole scene?

As grown up people, we've heard the story many times and have come to accept the strangeness of it all. But these small people are so new to the world. They don't have all the details yet, but they don't seem to doubt that it could all be true.

I watched as the children told the story of the coming of a baby. Babies come into the world as little reflecting mirrors of the grown ups around them. The fact that they exist brings out the best and also the worst in us — the round the clock care, the constant dependency, and availability. You would think a little baby would give us this great opportunity to show off how strong and capable we really are, how able we are to care for them. They are so small, after all. And we are so big.

As it turns out, babies do the very opposite, revealing our weakness, our neediness, our limited supply. They show us everything we are not, all the things we cannot do, balance, hold, finish, or remember. But they also reveal beauty, pull out our best when we think there's nothing left, and compel us toward them, again and again, just by their presence in the room.

This Emmanuel is no different. He reflects for us our neediness and our weakness as well as our capacity for hope, love, and redemption. And the wonder of the story is that even as he exposes the need, his is the presence that meets it.

God with us becomes God in us, and the strength found in weakness becomes living and active and true.

As we mingle together after the performance was over, we ate our cookies and we had our red punch, but it was shortly announced that Joseph was feeling ill and Mary had a fever and so we decided to carry our wonder safely home.

But I didn't quickly forget the beauty of weakness as told through the wide-eyed wonder of those four-year-olds.

They were play-acting the true story of the most important rescue mission in history. They were reflecting the story of my life, of all of our lives, every single day.

We show up even when we don't know what's going on and we make room for Jesus, even when things don't make full sense. And if we'll let him, if we're paying attention, when he appears, a thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices and our soul will feel its worth.

And so just for these final few moments, I want to give you the gift I promise most often here, space for your soul to breathe. Take a moment to consider:

If you had to use just one word to describe the state of your own soul today, what would that word be?

As you imagine the scene in Bethlehem the unlikely gathering of people, the true story of Jesus' birth that the four year olds portrayed, what stands out to you?

As you think about what these next 2 weeks will hold for you as well as what you might be missing, what do you wish people knew about you and your current situation?

As you acknowledge the longing, the excitement, the fear, or regret, are you willing to place it all into the hands of God today?

May we remember Jesus has come, not for the sake of a good story but for the sake of our soul. May we not push aside our own longing, heartbreak, or thrill of hope, no matter how small.

May we allow the miracle of the life of Jesus to be born in us again today as we continue to do our next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to Episode 64 of The Next Right Thing.

As I mentioned at the top of this episode this will be our last of 2018 and it has been an honor to be your host this year - we have more content coming your way at the beginning of 2019 but for now, I want to mention a few things I don't want you to miss.

About a month ago we spruced up my website and added a couple of dates to my 2019 calendar. You can find those at [emilypfreeman.com/workwithme](http://emilypfreeman.com/workwithme) (no dashes just straight up workwithme) and I wanted to highlight one event coming up in March called The Breath and the Clay. My friend, Stephen Roach is the founder of this beautiful gathering. I spoke at their very first event several years ago - I'll link to my talk from that event in the show notes - and I'll be coming back in 2019.

If you crave the kind of connection that is found at the intersection of art, faith, and culture I hope you'll join us - the dates are March 21-23 I'll be speaking on Friday night. The early bird rate expires on December 31 which is why I wanted to be sure to tell you now.

My second thing one of my favorite blog posts to write all year is my list of my 10 favorite books that I read all year. That post is up at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) where you can peruse not only this year's top ten list but every year-end list I've made for the past 4 years that's five years worth, and that's 50 great books in all and I'm sure you'll find a new favorite in the mix.

Finally, I want to say a thank you specifically to listener Tammy who says she found out about this podcast because a friend referred her to it (By the way the highest compliment for a podcast host is when you share episodes with friends and family because you don't want to be the one to send them something they are not going to like. So thank you for thinking that your friends are going to like The Next Right Thing. I am so grateful.) but specifically Tammy, she said that she found the podcast exactly when she needed it in her life. Then she says, Y'all, I love this: "I was planning to print off each and every episode and put them in a binder, but then The Next Right Thing book announcement came — pre-order check." What a gift, Tammy. Thank you so much for listening and also thanks as to those of you who have preordered The Next Right Thing book - Y'all, it's coming this April, ready or not, that is less than four months from now and I can't wait.

That is perhaps the biggest news of 2018 around here - in the Spring we'll have a Next Right Thing book - hardcover, gift-able, and it's short chapters and each chapter ends with a prayer and a practice. It will be easier than ever to give yourself a daily reminder to create space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing.

And finally, finally of course, that's all thanks to you. You are basically the best and I'm so grateful to you for listening, sharing, and leaving kind reviews this year. And here at the end of the year I want to tuck in a little thank you to my assistant, Traci. She's the one who puts together our show notes as well she makes sure that each week you have a transcript to download, that is what Tammy was talking about at [thenextrightthingpodcast.com](http://thenextrightthingpodcast.com). Thank you, Traci, for your hard work and for making this podcast even better.

And so we look forward with hope to 2019 as we continue to adopt this next right thing mindset. I can't wait to see what's in store.

From my family to yours, Merry Christmas.