



Episode 75: Tell Yourself the Truth

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 75.

This is a podcast all about making decisions whether you're chronically hesitant and tend to be a decision-avoider OR if you're someone who makes a lot of decisions on the daily and, while you may be confident in making them, the sheer volume of decisions has worn you out.

This is also a place for you if just need a little white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment.

For a few minutes each week, you've come to the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

If you're having trouble making a move, taking a step, or discerning your right direction, consider the story you're believing that might not be true. Perhaps facing the reality of what's really happening within you could finally free you up to do the next right thing.

Listen in.

A group of children stand in our front yard, doling out roles for the next round of hide and seek. "You be it," they say to one of the older ones, "and we'll hide." The one who's it shuts her eyes and begins to count out loud while the rest of the group scatters, looking for a place to hide where they won't be seen or, at least won't be seen *first*.

But the youngest among them stays right where she is, a clever smile on her smooth, round face. She makes only one move, the most important one in her mind. She blinks her eyes closed and puts her hands over her face, certain she's found the secret to remaining undetected.

If I can't see them, then they can't see me.

She forgets or hasn't learned yet a most basic tenet of reality: Just because she can't see us doesn't mean we aren't there. And just because she closes her eyes doesn't mean she's invisible. It's only a matter of time before she realizes her mistake.

On Tuesday, March 12, 2019, fifty people in six different states - including Hollywood actresses, wealthy business leaders, elite college coaches and more - were accused by the Department of Justice of playing a part in a major college admission scandal. People across the country are outraged but, in many cases, not surprised, to see this blatant display of power, privilege, and deception in an educational system that's supposed to be the launching pad for the next generation.

Now I don't claim to know much about college admissions in general and I certainly don't know all of the details surrounding the stories of the people allegedly involved in this most current and still developing scandal.

I've seen the jokes, the teasing, the "they got what was coming to them" comments. All of that could be appropriate and even true, I'm not here to say, but one question that keeps being repeated is how could parents do this? Grown people with common sense. How could they lie and cheat to get their kids into college?

As I've paid casual attention to the news this week another question continues to rise to the surface for me and that question is this: *What false narrative is at play here?*

In his book, *The Holy Longing*, Ronald Rolheiser says "we get into trouble whenever we don't name things properly." I've found that statement to be true over and over again in my own life.

When it comes to making decisions, we can't discount the importance of naming the unnamed things and admitting what lies beneath. Our unwillingness or inability to face the stories our

lives are telling us will not keep those stories from speaking. It will simply keep us from having a say in the way they play out.

Like the youngest one with her eyes closed in the middle of my front yard, what we believe about reality and our place within it will always determine what we do next. Our belief cannot be divorced from our action.

Here's something true about me: I have the endless capacity to see nearly every side of an issue. If I hear one perspective, I will generally receive it thoughtfully without much argument. Until someone with the opposing point of view explains their perspective, and I instantly see all the logic I was missing before.

The problem for me is I'm good at hearing all the sides, but I'm not so great at picking one. It's why I hate voting a little bit. (Although I do it. Reluctantly.) It's why I could never be an attorney. (The worst.) Or a judge. (Can you even imagine?)

I have thoughts and opinions, many of them strong. But they are slow to grow, which is why book writing suits me better than current-event-podcasting (though based on today's topic you wouldn't necessarily know that).

On the one hand, this openness is a gift. I am generally able to hold ideas with an open hand. I have practice in listening, considering, and waiting before I speak.

But they say our giftedness can also be our burden and there are many ways that this is true for me. Unchecked, this openness can become indifference, indecisiveness, and even intellectual laziness.

I am a slow processor, but I can easily use that as an excuse for not having to make a choice.

I know this shows up in my writing and maybe even some in this podcast. I recognize my hesitancy to make strong statements because one of my recurring fears is that I will say something now that I will completely disagree with later. It's happened before and I'm sure it will happen again.

Looking over some writing I did a few years ago, I read these words I wrote: *We are not called to action. We are called to belief.*

Not called to action?! What was I thinking?! I couldn't disagree with myself more. Of course, we're called to action!

In the context of the piece I wrote, I get it. I am a woman who has spent a lot of life, especially in college and early marriage, finding my identity and acceptance in my ability to perform well. So when it comes to acceptance before God, we are not called to the kind of action that performs for our own worthiness and love. We are invited to believe we have those gifts already.

But belief expresses itself through action, so for me now, that statement I made at first, is misleading. It isn't one or the other. *It's both.* The shape of our life is defined by the verbs.

Hope. Persevere. Feed. Help. Listen. *Believe.* Even this is a verb, a movement toward God even in the midst of confusion or frustration or fear.

The Lord told Moses to stretch out his hands over the sea and up came the walls of water. But Moses had to act on his belief and in doing so, the water became walls. The lame man had to pick up his mat and walk. The bleeding woman had to reach out her hand to touch. Noah built. The disciples followed. Esther asked. Abraham went.

From Hebrews 11:32-34, we read "And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies."

Reading this, none of these moved perfectly, but faith is fully expressed when we bring our imperfect work into the presence of God and move toward others in love.

We are not under *pressure* to act. We have been set *free* to act, to move, to make choices, to live out the truth. To live out the true things we say we believe.

Learning how to listen *and then move*, how to consider *and then choose* is an important part of the journey I'm still walking. For me, it's a key component of what it means to live life with God, to do our next right thing in love, to, as David Fitch so eloquently puts it, "live together in Christ's kingdom and bring the world along."

Our belief informs our action. What we believe will always direct our next steps. So what happens when we believe something that isn't true? That's what's been on my mind this week as this college admissions scandal continues to unfold.

I don't think parents wake up out of the blue one morning and say, you know I think I'm going to cheat the system and bribe some people so my kid can get into a good college.

Doing the next right thing happens one step at a time. So does doing the next wrong thing.

It starts small. It grows slow. It may begin with a general belief that we deserve something we aren't getting or we're owed something that isn't coming easy. We make a compromise here, a self-deception there, and eventually, the rationalizations start to feel justified. What once felt like a forbidden whisper in a dark room now speaks with confidence in plain view and we don't even try to hide it because now it's based on something we've convinced ourselves is true even when it isn't.

This is why the next right thing posture is so important. It can serve as a compass for us in the midst of a world tempting us to believe a false story about success, happiness, and about what the good life actually is. It can serve as an accessible fixed point in a culture that keeps moving the finish line.

Doing the next right thing is life-giving advice, sometimes even life-saving advice. Just ask the recovering alcoholics who've maintained their sobriety often by simply taking things one day at a time.

I don't know, exactly, why the parents, coaches, and administrators made the choices they made. But I do wonder what story they were telling themselves in the midst of it all. "We get into trouble whenever we don't name things properly."

This reflection on the life and choices of other people is meaningless if I don't let it inform my own life and my own choices.

In what ways are you standing in the front yard of your own life, eyes shut tight to the world?

Is there a reality you feel unwilling or unable to face?

Are you caught up in a self-deception so elaborate, so painful, that you cannot even begin to imagine your way out of it, much less make a change for real?

If so, I want to invite you to pause. Take a deep breath. Be relentlessly gentle with yourself. And find one way today to tell the truth.

Whisper it to yourself in an empty room. Bring it to God in whatever way you can. Ask him to show you the next right thing to do and trust that he will.

Because this thing you're carrying within you, this false story that has weaved its way around your life. It may not be illegal or immoral, but is it untrue?

Today, as you make decisions about your own life and on behalf of those you love, be willing to admit the false stories you've been telling yourself.

Receive the truth of God's presence with you and within you. You don't have to undo this all by yourself.

Listen for the heartbeat of your true self beneath the persona you've been carrying around for so long.

Take a breath. Tell the truth. And do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 75 of The Next Right Thing.

If we want to make decisions that reflect the truth we profess we believe, then we need to live our lives in such a way that support soulful decision making.

Because we believe life with God is better than life without God, then wouldn't it make sense that we, to the best of our ability, to the extent that it is within our capacity to choose, that we design our lives in such a way that our lives sing in harmony with the kingdom of God? That's what a rhythm of life is for. I'd love to help you create one.

You can start today with my brand new class, Discern + Decide, available for free when you pre-order my new book, *The Next Right Thing*. The book comes out on April 2 but you can start the class today.

Just a note: You can pre-order from anywhere at anytime as long as you do it before April 2, you can get your free gifts by simply visiting nextrightthingbook.com to claim your free access to Discern + Decide. As a thank you for your early support of the book, you'll also receive the audiobook for free when it becomes available on release day. I'll read the book to you in my very own voice.

One final announcement for today: if you live in or near to North Carolina, I'm going to be hosting for the first time ever, a live show for this podcast. How will that work exactly? Well, we're gonna find out together.

Join me Monday, April 1st in downtown Greensboro, North Carolina for a night to celebrate the release of my newest book *The Next Right Thing* - we'll have stories, conversation, books and bonus: we'll have some of my favorite humans joining us: Kendra Adachi from The Lazy Genius podcast, Annie F. Downs author and host of That Sounds Fun Podcast and my very own sister Myquillyn Smith, The Nester will be joining us as well. I'll force them on stage with me and we'll have a great time being together with you. Grab your ticket and a ticket for a friend through the link in the show notes. I hope joining us is your next right thing.

Well, I'll be honest, and I'll tell you that this episode was not an easy one but I think it's an important one. Because the truth is, no matter who we are, no matter where we live, we all carry around some false stories that lead to actions we can't always take back. Facing the story and

telling the truth may be difficult, but in the end it leads to freedom, not only for us alone but also for our entire community.

Some words to speak to that, I'll leave you with in closing, from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book, *Life Together*:

“Every act of self-control of the Christian is also a service to the fellowship. On the other hand, there is no sin in thought, word, or deed, no matter how personal or secret, that does not inflict injury upon the whole fellowship. An element of sickness gets into the body; perhaps nobody knows where it comes from or in what member it has lodged, but the body is infected. This is the proper metaphor for the Christian community. We are members of a body not only when we choose to be, but in our whole existence.”

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