



Episode 81: Listen To This Before Graduation

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 81.

This is a podcast all about making decisions. It's also a podcast about making a life.

For a few minutes each week, I'll offer you a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

While these short, weekly episodes always aim to serve those who are in transition, who are struggling with chronic hesitation or a general sense of decision fatigue, every now and then I'll dedicate an episode to a particular topic, like on New Years Day I did A Blessing for The New Year or I'll dedicate it to a particular group of people.

Today's episode is the latter. As we quickly approach the end of another school year, the time has come to talk to one specific group of people who may be carrying a lot of question marks. It's time to talk to our graduates.

Before we jump in, may I just say that my new book, *The Next Right Thing*, has now been out for one month and it makes a fantastic gift for the graduate in your life - it's hardcover and beautifully designed with green accents on the inside and the simple cover design makes this a great gift for guy or girl, man or woman. Grab a copy or 10 for the graduates in your life and tie it up with a green ribbon for a gift that says "I see you and you don't have to figure out your whole life at once. Just do the next right thing."

Now if you are someone graduating from high school, college, or graduate school OR if you know someone in this uniquely exciting and also potentially stressful and overwhelming stage of life, well, listen in.

A few weeks ago I got an email from a listener, a mom named Sharon and she had this question for me:

“Hi, Emily!

I have been a full-time, silent listener of your podcast since day one. (Thank you, Sharon.)

My daughter is graduating from high school in a few months, and I have seen her struggle with making after-high-school choices. So many of her peers struggle with this as well. Basically, it seems the only thing people ask a student in grade 12 is “what are your plans for the future/what are you doing after high school” and that question can be so stressful to a student who doesn’t know what he/she wants to do. How does a student stay chill when they don’t know what to do? How can a parent help a young adult do their next right thing when we don’t want to stifle God’s guiding in their life, but also, the 18-year-old needs to do something? You’re the boss of you and your podcast. I’ve just often thought “WW(EPF)D” when I’ve been helping my daughter navigate this really big time in her life.”

Well, first of all, thank you, Sharon, for putting my initials into the Jesus bracelet, WWJD. I really appreciate that comparison, very much so um, and also it’s true I may be the boss of my podcast but I’m handing the reigns over to you today anyway and letting you boss me because I think you’re right: this is an important question to consider and one I’m perhaps in a unique position to navigate. Not only because I host a podcast about life transitions and making decisions, but also because in a few short weeks, I’ll be graduating as well - not from high school, mind you, but from graduate school.

Even though the life-stage is different, the questions, hesitations, and excitements are much the same.

So I’ll speak both as a mom and as a graduate.

Because it doesn't matter if you're 18 and people want to know what college you're going to, or if you're 22 and people want to know about your career plans or if you're 42 like me and people want to know why you went to grad school in the first place or finally, if you're a mom or a dad and you want to give your graduate direction but you also help them navigate the questions on their own.

And while I'm sure there are hundreds or even a thousand things that I could say, well I decided a long time ago to keep these episodes short. So, I've chosen just three things to remember as you or a student you love moves into the next stage of life after graduation:

1. Keep a light heart.

Just because people ask a question in a certain way does not obligate you to answer the question they're asking. Many times people ask me why I went back to school. PS. If you really want to know the answer to that question, I share it in detail in Episode 50, that's 5 - 0. But the truth is, I don't always answer it directly for two reasons: number one, I honestly don't have a short, succinct answer for that and number two, when people ask me they aren't typically asking for a 3 point answer, they're just making small talk, being curious, or can't think of what else to say once they hear I'm in grad school.

And if you're a senior in high school, same goes. Most of the time, people are just being people. Like asking about the weather, they ask you about school.

When the questions come, there is no wrong answer. Keep a light heart. Assume people are on your side. Decide ahead of time what you want to say because you know that they are going to ask. Remember "I don't know" is a valid answer. Just because you can't explain it doesn't mean it's wrong. And just because your answer may be different from other people's answers or from what you thought your answer would be at this stage in your life, well that doesn't make it wrong either.

Be slow to judge, slow to speak, slow to anger and not just toward others, but especially toward yourself. Keep a light heart and be relentlessly kind to yourself and to the people asking the questions. Let that be your first spiritual practice as you move into your post-graduate life. If

you see the question coming, no matter what comes out of your mouth decide ahead of time it's going to be wrapped in kindness.

2. It's okay not to have a five year plan.

Jamie B. Golden, co-host of The Popcast and The Bible Binge said a line about making future plans that I liked so much, I put it on page 223 of *The Next Right Thing*. What did she say? She said she's stopped making 5 year plans because "God's word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path, not my football field."

Here's the thing: we live in a stadium lights culture. But most of our life is lived under the lamp light of the path of everyday life. That doesn't change just because we're graduating. Yes, this is a big moment. Yes, we've come a long way and accomplished much. But we are still called to now, still given only this day, still invited to trust God with our next right thing.

That means we can live our days in confidence even if we can't see the whole year. And while decisions still have to be made, and choices still need to be chosen, we don't have to freak out if we still can't see five years into the future. We wouldn't be prepared for it anyway. When it comes to the future, let your ignorance be a blessed gift, not a liability.

3. Your pace is your pace.

This pivotal transition from high school to college or from college into the world is equal parts thrilling and terrifying.

You're told to dream big and aim high. But is it all a bit too much? Is this the pace your life wants to go?

Do you already feel behind before you've barely even started? Do you lose sleep at night because you didn't get that internship? Are you already caught up in the comparison game, running a race that feels impossible to win?

As you move into the world and begin to uncover who you are as a person, a creator, a student, a friend, and maybe an employee, don't forget who you are in Christ.

No matter how far you travel away from home, you are never alone because Christ has made his home in you.

He'll keep company with you at a walking pace. He won't let you miss your own future.

That's three things to remember, but I'm going to give you a bonus assignment before we close: Pause to look back.

Take a little time before graduation or just after graduation and make a short list of what you've learned. Not about history, or systematic theology or the Pythagorean theorem. Make a list of what you've learned about yourself. What are you bringing forward into the world in this new stage of life? What gifts are we waiting to receive from you?

This will remind you of what your schooling has done for you, how being there has shaped you, and how you'll be changed moving forward.

And because I never like to invite you to do something I haven't done myself, I'll go first.

When people ask me why I want to grad school or what I've learned as a result, or what I'm going to do afterward, here are a few things I'll say.

I'm learning how to walk into a room.

I'm learning that even though my natural tendency is to lean back and blend in, I am often called to lean forward.

I'm learning how to bring peace with me into a chaotic situation.

I'm learning how to sit down on the inside even when I have to stand up on the outside.

I'm learning I can be my full, feminine, creative, authentic self and it's not a liability, it's a necessity. A strength. A gift.

I'm learning to access courage to speak up even when it feels unnatural, even when there's opposition, even when I don't want to.

I'm learning I can be a leader even when I'm not in charge. In fact, it's an imperative call.

I'm learning, as my teacher James Bryan Smith says, "the kingdom of God is not in trouble and neither am I."

Isn't that root of it? Because as much as we want to be independent and on our own, as much as the high school student might be thrilled the time has almost come for him to finally leave the house, as much as the college student might rejoice at the thought of no more semesters, the truth is when the sun goes down and the house gets quiet, what we really want to know is this: *is everything going to be okay?*

It's tempting to think only children have the question, but I'll let you in on a secret you already know: this is a question we never grow out of. Whether you're 8, 18, 28 or 80, we all want to feel safe and seen and protected.

Is someone watching over me?

The answer in a word is yes.

May we be gentle with ourselves as we get still, stop talking, and pause the constant string of questions happening within and around us. May we remember to keep a light heart, to stop trying to plan so far ahead, and to embrace the pace our life invites us to walk without fear or second-guessing.

May the love of the Father, the power of the Son, and the protection of the Holy Spirit be with you now as you simply do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to Episode 81 of The Next Right Thing.

All of these insights shared in today's episode are taken in one way or another from the principles listed in *The Next Right Thing* book. If you are a graduate or know a graduate, high school, college, or graduate school, this book will make a lovely gift. You can find it in the US at Barnes and Noble or [Barnesandnoble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com), Books A Million or [booksamillion.com](https://www.booksamillion.com), [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and the book releases in the UK this week just in time, I hope, for your graduates as well.

But, of course, it's not a book just for graduates, it's for mothers, for workers, for employers, and employees, for anyone facing decisions in their life big or small who want to not only make better decisions but to make their decisions in a better way. It's clear I can't get enough of talking about decision making and about the people we are becoming because of our indecision. I'll keep doing that here every Tuesday until it is no longer fun or it doesn't make sense anymore. But if you would like something to hold in your hands or if this podcast has been meaningful for you, I hope you'll grab a copy of *The Next Right Thing* either for you or for someone you want to support. As always you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman or at [emilypfreeman.com](https://www.emilypfreeman.com) where you can click on "podcast" in the top navigation and grab a transcript for any of the episodes including this one that you have either missed or want to refer back to in written form.

In this season of finishing up, of moving on, of celebrations and endings and new beginnings, I'll close with a short blessing, first for the graduate then for the parent.

For the graduate, whether you are transitioning from one classroom to another or from classroom to workplace, may you ever be a student of life, of people, and of the world around you.

May your apprehension of the future melt into hope. May you make your choices from a place of truth and confidence, not from the shaky ground of fear. May you not be overwhelmed by too many options or underwhelmed by the lack of them. May you know your Father sees you and He knows what you need.

For the parent of the graduate, though your job is never finished, though you won't get closure on the work you do or the love you pour out, may you breathe in a deep sigh of relief as

you have kept kind company with your child through another year of their life transitions. As you watch and walk with her, may you be lifted in your spirit as you see her grow, trusting the details of her future to a God you know. May you be one who receives the gifts your Father offers you in secret so that you may turn and offer those gifts to your children – the gift of love, the gift of presence, the gift of hope.

Congratulations to you on all your hard work. To the graduates, the parents, and friends, and spouses of the graduates, I'm right there with you. We are almost there. Way to go.

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