



06: Know The Power of Naming

Every week, I open with a description of who this podcast is for, the second guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue. Now, I've heard from so many of you who say, "That's me," when you've heard that description and I'm so glad you can relate. But our inability to find ease in decision-making isn't always because we're chronically hesitant or because we're feeling overwhelmed. There may be another force at work here, moving just beneath the surface, and that's what I want to talk about today. Here's a hint from Ronald Rolheiser's book, *The Holy Longing*, where he says this, "We get into trouble whenever we do not name things properly."

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to *The Next Right Thing*. You're listening to episode six, on the power of a name. If this is your first time listening in, this is a place where those who suffer from decision fatigue come to clear the clutter. If you're in a season of transition, waiting, general fogginess, or if you've ever searched how to make a decision on the internet, well, you're in the right place.

Back when we still had an answering machine, I came home one day and hit play to hear the messages. A woman robot tells me not to hang up because this could be the most important call of my life. Then she says her records indicate that I may not have health insurance and then she promises help is on the way if only I will press one now, but I should be prepared to experience a short wait due to the tremendous response. So basically, a robot wants to change my life, but I'm going to have to be patient. Needless to say, I did not press one. I wouldn't have pressed one even if I didn't have health insurance. Even if I needed the thing the robot was offering, I wouldn't have wanted it that way.

One, because I'm not a fool. Two, I have no respect for a robot on my answering machine, which is essentially robots leaving messages for robots if you really get down to it. When it comes to buying health insurance or doing any kind of business, we at least want to be able to talk to a person, someone who knows our name, or at the very least, someone who has a name. Names are important. There's a reason why we name babies when they are born. Beyond all the very ancient and spiritual history behind naming, another reason is simply so we have a way to refer to you. So when we call your name, you'll turn your head. When we refer to you when you aren't there, your name gives you a presence in the room.

13 years ago, we twin girls, but we named our first girl before we realized there were two. I had her name picked out months before we knew we were pregnant at all. Her name is delicate and ladylike and lovely, but the day we found out I was carrying two girls and not just one, the pressure to pick a second name was heavy. I couldn't bear the thought of my girls within me, limbs pressing in on me and on one another, one with a name and the other without. So as soon as we left the hospital, shiny black and white ultrasound photos clutched in my swollen hand, John and I chose a name as we sat at a spotlight on Gray Valley

Road. We knew right away the name was a fit. I felt deeply satisfied that both our girls now had our love in the form of two beautiful names.

It was powerful to name them before we met them, to have them come into this messy world with a sense of belonging already built in. This is your name little one. You will carry this with you from this moment until forever. This name is a piece of you. Jesus calmed Martha by saying her name twice. He changed Simon's name to Peter, the rock. He added the H to Abram, literally putting Yahweh, the sound of God into Abraham's name. God's attention is turned not toward politics or policy, but towards people and their names. Names mean things, carry weight and importance and intimacy. To know a person's name is to know something of them.

The world is not a nameless, faceless, green and blue mass of land and water. The world is made of people, rich with story, full of intrigue, longing for passion and love and adventure. Knowing people begins with knowing their name. In her book *Walking on Water*, Madeleine L'Engle says, "Our names are part of our wholeness. To be given a name is an act of intimacy as powerful as any act of love. Naming is powerful when it comes to people. But it's powerful for other things as well."

There's a chef featured in the second episode of the first season of *Chef's Table*. By the way, if you listen to this podcast long enough, you'll know that I often take examples from books and TV. You're welcome. It said if you eat a carrot at this chef's restaurant, you discover the carrotness of carrots. In this episode of *Chef's Table*, farmers and food writers describe Dan Barber as a chef who wants to do more than feed people delicious food, but wants to change his community and ultimately the world. Some would say he's doing that now, but it didn't start out that way. Back in the spring of 2000, he opened his restaurant Blue Hill in New York. He wanted to open a bistro, a neighborhood place, and they wanted to have a place to showcase Dan's food and then see what happened from there.

Dan himself says they started out with good food. It wasn't great, but it was good. It was a lot of work and they were trudging through it. So they had been open a couple of months and it was asparagus season. Dan went to the farmer's market and he bought a few cases of asparagus. But when he came back to the restaurant, it was only then that he realized they already had cases of asparagus. In fact, they had way more cases of asparagus than he knew what to do with and there he was holding more. Well, he lost it. He had a fit on the episode. He uses a lot of choice words to explain how he felt about the situation. So he decided he was going to use all that asparagus by putting it in every single dish on the menu that night, even the desserts. He knew it was ridiculous, but he had already announced to everyone that he was doing it.

So he dug in his heels and kept going, even though he was afraid of embarrassing himself. Well, wouldn't you know it, that very night, the most important and respected restaurant reviewer in the country comes to the Blue Hill. Dan Barber was mortified. He was sure he made a fool of himself and had no idea what this renowned reviewer thought. Until not long after that, the article hit. "King of the Hill," it said in giant letters with a subhead that read, "Blue Hill proves that a farm restaurant can grow among the skyscrapers of Manhattan." In short, the reviewer loved it. At the end of the day, Dan Barber says this about that food writer, "He defined us before we really knew who we were. He named us the new epitome of farm to table, a restaurant that was not shy about advertising a product that was at the height of its flavor."

That review was the catalyst for the growth of this new struggling restaurant. Being defined made all

the difference. Until that reviewer gave them a name, they didn't really know who they were. That is the power of naming. If naming can do all that, Christen us into life and release new growth. Is the opposite also true? That allowing things to remain unnamed and unacknowledged could hold the life back? Maybe a reason why a particular decision you are carrying today feels so difficult is because there are things beneath the surface that remain unnamed in you, things you either haven't acknowledged or would rather ignore.

In episode two, I shared about an invitation I received to travel as a writer to the Philippines with Compassion International. I was all torn up about that decision. I felt tossed here and there between yes and no. It wasn't until I finally got down to the root of the indecision that I was able to move, the root in that case was fear, plain and simple. Finally naming the fear helped me move forward with a yes. Without a name, we can't be specific and there's nothing fear likes more than non-specificity. We have enemy who loves to cloak our minds over with generalities and a vague sense of anxiety, no wonder we can't make a decision. It's important to note, though, that this acknowledgement cannot be rushed. It cannot be faked and it cannot be forced. You can't rush the naming or force things into definitions that aren't meant to have any.

A few months ago I was having back pain. So I went to get a massage and the therapist pointed out that the side I was having trouble with wasn't actually the side where she noticed the most tension. Well, immediately, I went into question mode, "Oh, what does that mean? Is that bad?" I wanted an answer. I wanted an explanation for what was happening with my back and I thought maybe she had discovered it. But her answer taught me an important lesson. "It's not bad," she said, "it's just information." What would it look like to let ourselves be gatherers of information when it comes to what's happening within us, beneath the surface? Don't force a name, but don't turn away either.

If you're having trouble thinking clearly, focusing on tasks, having a conversation with people, looking them in the eye or making a decision, give yourself a few moments in the morning to simply pay attention to what might be happening in the unseen places of your soul. I wonder what remains unnamed in you today? Is there a hurt you haven't quite let go? A regret that's been following you for so long that you thought it was normal? An excitement you haven't given yourself permission to explore? Or something you have longed for for years, but haven't yet put into words? A dream that might be hanging out in the wings, kicking shyly at rocks or standing on tiptoes.

Did one of your children just start kindergarten or go off to college? Did your spouse just start a new job? Is there someone in your family with a fresh diagnosis, a friend who is celebrating a success you wish it was yours? All of these life circumstances have the potential to influence us in all kinds of ways. If they remain unacknowledged, they could influence us in ways we don't understand or can't pin down. Parker Palmer says to let your life speak and he means it for the purpose of vocation, but our lives are always speaking in a million little ways. Be willing to listen even if you're afraid you won't like what you hear. Be assured you will never be listening alone. We have a father who hears everything, even the things we are afraid to say.

For all the ways we've experienced healing, we know there is still much within us that remains unseen and unnamed. Shine the warm light of grace into the shadows and be the courage we need to respond. Hold back shame with your powerful hand and extend to us your father kindness, we pray. Because though we may be grown on the outside, we are small within. Embrace us in our littleness. As we turn our face to

you, may we see our true selves reflected in your gaze. Not as people who have a spirit of fear, but one of power, love and a sound mind.

May we refuse to condemn ourselves as hypocrites simply because we don't feel powerful or loving or particularly sound of mind. Instead, may we embrace the truth that a hypocrite is not acting contrary to how we feel, rather it's behaving contrary to who we are. In Christ, we are the loved and the loving. This is our truest story. Spin us back out into the world as people who know who we are. Surprise us with the joy we cannot explain. Give us the courage to face what we have so long tried to ignore and be our peace as we take one step forward and do the next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode six of The Next Right Thing. You can access the show notes and a full transcript when you visit thenextrightthingpodcast.com. You can find me on Instagram, @emilypfreeman, and at emilypfreeman.com. Again, I've loved hearing from you on Instagram and through email. To those of you who have left reviews, thank you. I cannot tell you how helpful that is. I hope these short episodes continue to help you create a little more space for your soul to breathe so you can discern your next right thing. In closing, a timely reminder from Psalm 20 verse 7 of the most powerful name of all, some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord, our God.