



10: Be Where You Are

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 10, Be Where You Are.

Before we jump in to today's episode, I wanted to take a minute and thank you again for your kind support of this new podcast. Whether you're a brand new listener today, or if you've been listening since we started, thank you, thank you. It's been two months since the first episode aired, and now that we've made it to episode 10, well I don't know, it kind of feels like a milestone.

Now, something you might not know is that we have a complete transcript available for every episode of The Next Right Thing. So if you prefer reading to listening, simply visit thenextrightthingpodcast.com, where you can download the episode transcripts for free.

To let you in on the process a little bit, these episodes release on Tuesdays, which for me right now means Mondays are recording days. The night before this recording day, I couldn't sleep because I was making to-do lists in my head. When it was finally time to get up for the day, I got up to start in on those lists only to be sidetracked by a computer that wouldn't charge and a car that wouldn't start. The irony was not lost on me; that my next right thing was clearly to attend to both of these things first so that I could record this episode of The Next Right Thing.

So if this is your first time listening in, this is a podcast for the second guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue. This is also a place for those of you who may just need a little bit of white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information or the sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment. Maybe you long for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step. Maybe today you're staring down a to-do list a mile long. The problem isn't so much about indecision about what needs to be done, but maybe for you, the problem is just simple overwhelm because you know what needs to be done and you have no idea where to start. If that's you, this episode is for you.

It was the beginning of 2014 and we had just spent a week on a cruise as a family. It was cloudy when we got off the ship in Miami, an unseasonably cool day for the area. The weather didn't bother me in the least. I was simply glad to finally see land. Looking back, the most important thing I learned after my first cruise experience was this. If someone tries to convince you to go on your first cruise and one of the arguments they use to persuade you include the words, "The ship is so big, you can't even feel it move," do now, I repeat, do not believe them. They sit on a throne of lies.

In my family's defense, the ones who had convinced me to come, who had been on cruises many times before in their lives, they did admit that this cruise was by far the rockiest. Small comfort that was to me, right? Because there I was on a small city in the middle of the ocean with days and days ahead of me and miles and miles of only water and the only choice was to stay on that rocking ship.

So what do you do when you feel the rocking and you can't get off? First, you vow to never take another cruise again, and to only book hotels on land from this day forward. Second, you find a way through it and you learn to be where you are. For me, this looked like working hard to make peace with the rocking ship, rather than trying to fight against it. It meant finding peace in the midst of my circumstance, rather than waiting for my circumstance to change and bring peace.

Sometimes my to-do lists feel like that rocking ship. The world says, "Tackling your list will calm the waters," but it's a myth. Just ask me how I know. Instead I'm learning how to make peace with the waves, learning how to bring peace with me into the chaos, rather than trying to calm the chaos in order to find the peace.

In his book, *Souvenirs of Solitude*, Brennan Manning says this. "I don't expect and I don't like a God who comes to me in failure, in loneliness, in poverty, yet God comes to me where I live and loves me where I am. If I am not where I am, God cannot meet me. It's as simple as that. But when I remain where I am with everything that is moving inside me, salvation comes."

Today I'm especially thinking of those of us who are just in the midst of super busy seasons. This may not apply just for regular day stuff, but if you're in a time of intense busyness or have so many tasks and activities to do that you simply can't manage to be where you are, today I just have two simple responses. One is an action. The other a question.

First, the action. In times of intense activity and full schedules, I found one practical way to take one next right step in the midst of the overwhelm. Here's what I do. I make a page long list of everything I have to do and get it all down in one place. For example, right now in my bullet journal, I have a page with the heading, [inaudible 00:05:39] Guided Writing Retreat at the top, because at the end of this month I'm co-hosting a writing retreat in Charlotte. So I've written every single thing on that page that I need to do for the retreat, and it's good to get it all in one place.

But if that list is the one that I work from, what ends up happening for me is I feel overwhelmed when I look at it, even if I'm checking things off, because the amount of things that remain unchecked is so much greater than the amount of things I'm checking off. So I will use that list as a starting point, but for my daily list, I will look at the master list and then choose a task by simply asking myself what is the next right thing I can do right now. When I choose something, I write it down on a fresh page and I only do that task. When that one's finished, I check it off. And only then will I write down the next one. This is super simple, but it makes a big difference for me because instead of seeing everything at once, it forces me to simply focus on the next right thing.

And by the way, I don't only put project tasks on this list. That's not real life. Sometimes my next right thing on my daily list is to take a 10 minute break. Sometimes it's to eat lunch. It could be put in a load of laundry, go to the bank, walk around the block. In seasons of intense activity, recording your next right thing in a list becomes a sort of liturgy, a way to slow yourself down and simply take the next right step.

And if you're motivated by a completed list, like I am, it can be satisfying at the end of the day, to have a record of what happened that day, instead of an anemic list of all the things that you didn't finish. Again, this might not work for just regular day activities when you're in a regular rhythm of life, but for those times in life where it seems like everything is coming at you at once, and for me, that usually happens this time of year, when school schedules, work schedules, church and family and community life all sort of combine to create this perfect storm of activity, this simple practice of writing down your next right thing is just one way to perhaps slow you down, root you in the present and help you be where you are rather than trying to rush ahead to get where you think you need to be.

When I think about the way that Jesus lived his life on earth, Luke Chapter 8 comes to mind, when Jairus comes to Jesus and says that his daughter is dying and he wants his help. And when Jesus goes into the house, it turns out he's too late, and the young girl had already died. But Jesus didn't seem to be in a hurry. He didn't seem overwhelmed. He didn't come undone. He did not seem to need to prove himself, impress the crowd, avoid embarrassment or explain himself. When Jesus walks in this room, he doesn't take the entire crowd with him, but just a few of his disciples. And the girl's parents were there too. He tells her to get up, much like a parent would tell their child to get up in the morning, and she did.

In my mind it seems like the very next thing he should do while he has everyone's attention is to tell her parents maybe all the wonderful things this girl was going to do with her life. Maybe give her a five-year plan, a ten-year plan, some type of hopeful vision for her future. This was such a fantastic opportunity. And instead, do you remember what he said? He gave orders for something to be given to her to eat. I love that instruction because essentially what Jesus said to those parents was this; simply do the next right thing in love. Your daughter's alive. Now give her lunch.

This is a story of how Jesus lived on earth, but Jesus is still living in us today. The way he lived then, isn't so different from the way he wants to live now. He simply took his next right step with his father and he invites us to do the same.

Making a list of your next right step and only your next right step, that is one super practical way of moving through the chaos.

I told you I'd share an action, and finally, a question. You've probably seen this one coming. Here's the question, or rather a series of questions to help you consider your next right step.

First, in order to be where you are, it's good to know where you are. Where are you? What is moving inside you? This is where you may need to carve out a little bit of space, or even let this episode be that space for you. If you have trouble figuring out where you are, episode 6 could be a good resource for you.

Now I'll actually make this easy for you today by giving you just a little bit of space right now as you listen. I'll ask a series of questions and give you a few moments to consider for yourself what the answers might be. We'll do this simple practice to help you get present to where you are so that you can be where you are and allow God to meet you there.

So in this moment, where are you?

What's the first emotion that comes to mind?

Is there something you fear today? If so, name it.

Is there something that excites you today? If so, what is it?

In this moment what is the truest thing about you?

What do you want it to be?

What are you hoping for?

If you had trouble answering any or all of these questions, then that is where you are today, and there is no shame in that.

Father, help us to know where we are and then help us to be where we are. Meet us in our weakness, our smallness, our exhaustion, our insecurity, and our questions. As we move forward in the midst of where we are, help us to see you even when we don't see you. May we not demand a spectacle, a miracle or a sign. May we simply, quietly be still and know. Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Thanks for listening to Episode 10 of The Next Right Thing.

I'm Emily P. Freeman, author of four books, including *Simply Tuesday* and *A Million Little Ways*. Both are available at emilypfreeman.com/books or wherever books are sold. You can also find me on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman. And visit thenextrightthingpodcast.com for a complete transcript of this episode.

If you are in a particularly full season, you might benefit from a free video resource I created. I'll include it on the show notes page for this episode. It's a free four-part video series to help you create space for your soul to breathe today. Simply visit today's show notes at thenextrightthingpodcast.com for access.

In closing, give yourself a minute and receive these words from this familiar passage of scripture from Psalm 23.

“The Lord is my shepherd. There is nothing I shall want. Fresh and green are the pastures where he gives me repose. Near restful waters, he leads me to revive my dripping spirit. He guides me along the right path. He's true to his name. If I should walk in the valley of darkness, no evil would I fear. You were there with your crook and your staff. With these, you give comfort. You have prepared a banquet for me in the sight of my foes. My head, you have anointed with oil. My cup is overflowing. Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life. In the Lord's own house, shall I dwell forever and ever.”