



## 100: Tell Me About You (and I'll Tell You About Me)

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 100.

This is a podcast all about making decisions. It's also a podcast about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or even if you're pretty great at making decisions, but in your current season of life you could use a reminder to simply do the next right thing. Well, then you're in the right place.

Now, I'm trying to be all cool about it, but did you hear it's the 100th episode of The Next Right Thing Podcast? And I can hardly believe it. By way of celebration here are a few more numbers I'll share with you now. First, and most obvious, we've officially made it into the three digit episode numbers and we're never going back. This fall marked two years since the first episode aired, and, as of last week, we have a total of 5 million downloads.

Looking back over the last two years, a lot has changed in my own life. Our girls started high school. Our son started middle school. I released a book, and I started and finished grad school. Through it all one thing has remained constant and that's my love of crafting these short weekly episodes for you and your kind and consistent receiving of them.

Over the past two years I've heard from many of you via your reviews, emails, letters, comments, DMs, and private messages, and I've also met many of you in person, which is my favorite, but one thing I've never done and I can hardly believe it is I've never asked more questions about you via a survey.

It seems the 100th episode is the perfect time to learn more about who you are, how you found me here, and maybe even what your favorite episode of the podcast is. If you're willing to take a few minutes and visit [emilypfreeman.com/survey](http://emilypfreeman.com/survey) I would be so grateful. And as a thank you, just by filling out the survey, you'll be entered to win \$100 Amazon gift card to shop with as you please. I recommend filling your cart with books, but that's just me. All you have to do is visit [emilypfreeman.com/survey](http://emilypfreeman.com/survey) and tell me everything. Easy, right?

Well, back in episode 50, I shared about the importance of going forward to something. Specifically, in that episode, I shared the story about how I decided to go forward to graduate school. You can always go back and listen to that one if you like, but today's episode is somewhat of a part two to that one because 50 episodes, one book, and one master's degree later, I have the next part of that story to tell. As part of the 100 episode celebration, I hope you'll listen in.

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So here's the thing. I started this podcast after I attempted to write a book on decision-making and I couldn't come up with a single solitary sentence that made sense. True story. I've told it many times already so I won't rehash it here, but basically, I was struggling through a big decision and I was also paying attention to how that big unmade decision, well, it pushed me closer to God. And then I started taking notes.

I noticed the discernment process was not, in fact, about simply going into a situation with a question and coming out with a clear answer. It was actually a formation process necessary to grow our faith, to teach us how to discern God's voice, and to draw us into community. Unmade decisions had the power to draw us closer to God or, if we let them, push us further from God and that fascinated me.

As much as we may wish it otherwise, decision-making is not something to be systemized, overly simplified, generalized or delegated. But it's the actual road upon which I'm invited to walk in order to be formed more fully into the likeness of Christ.

Those are the kinds of things I was thinking in my head, but like I said, when I tried to write them down thinking that could be my next book, nothing came out right. So I decided to speak them out

instead. I spent the summer crafting the first episodes, teaching myself how to use new technology, and asking lots of questions from people who knew a whole lot more than I did. Then on August 9th, 2017, the first episode of this podcast aired and exactly two weeks and one day later I attended my first online class in the Christian Spiritual Formation and Leadership master's program at Friends University.

Looking back, maybe it sounds crazy to you already. Well, it feels crazy to me too that those two things happen so close together. But it was actually that graduate school decision that was the catalyst for the podcast in the first place.

As I mentioned, when I first told the story in episode 50, when people learned I enrolled in grad school, their first question was why? It's a totally normal question to ask. It's important to know why we do things and it's normal to be curious why other people do things, but it's important also to recognize how we define the word why. Historically, I thought my why always had to include a clear plan for the future. Now, I realize my why could be much smaller than that. Like just the shape of my next right thing.

The danger in my insistence on always knowing the big picture why is I can be afraid to move until I can fully explain something. And I'm not sure that's the way God intends for us to live. He doesn't ask me for my clear explanations. He asks me to be faithful. He asks me to trust him.

Those two years enrolled at Friends University were a gift to me in ways I'm honestly still unwrapping even now, but looking back on my time there some of the most sacred and transformational moments happened during our week-long residencies.

Our program was structured as a cohort model so we would take an online class each semester and we would take a few in the summer, and then we would meet for a week in-person, as well, during each semester, fall, spring, and then again in the fall and the spring. That was one of the greatest gifts knowing that every semester I had a full week blocked off on my calendar and no matter how busy my work got, no matter what was happening on my to-do list, I knew that four times over the course of my studies I was going to get on an airplane and fly to Wichita, Kansas and I was going to spend a week with my brothers and sisters in my cohort of the Masters in Christian Spiritual Formation and Leadership Program.

One of our residency teachers, Keith Matthews, summed it up nicely. He said, “There is no transformation without feedback from others.”

In other words, we need each other. And I was grateful that the way this program is designed, while it recognizes the importance not only of our personal practice and apprenticeship to Jesus, but of communal practice as well. When I applied for school three years ago, I didn’t have a clear plan with bullet points. I didn’t have a job I wanted to get that required this degree or even the cultural expectation you have when you decide to go to college the first time because that’s just what you do.

So one thing of many that I’ve learned is that we’re always invited to take one step forward, even though we may not be sure where the 20th step is going to lead. And I believe that with all my heart. But here’s the fun part. The summer of 2017, starting this podcast, was my next right thing and starting school was, too, but now I’ve graduated, and I have the advantage of looking back from the future. And I can tell you though I didn’t know exactly why then, the why is becoming more clear now. Because starting in the fall of 2020, I’ll be returning to Wichita not as a student this time, but as one of the residency lecturers.

In a surprising turn of events last spring, the program director Keas Keasler invited me to join their team as one of the instructors during those week-long residencies that I loved so much. Some other teachers in the program are writers and theologians you may have heard of. Keas Keasler, I already mentioned, but also, James Bryan Smith, Jan Johnson, A.J. Swoboda, Deb Hirsch, John Mark Comer, and J.R. Briggs. This wasn’t the path I was expecting when I enrolled, but now that it’s the one I’m on, it makes the most sense in the world.

For years I’ve been wanting to find more ways to, as my friend Natasha Robinson says, invest in smaller groups of people over longer periods of time. I’ve already been praying for the cohort of students who are where I was three years ago, still trying to discern their next right thing. I looked forward to serving Cohort V starting in 2020 and by the way, if you think a masters in Christian spiritual formation and leadership might be your next right thing, well, they’re now accepting applications. I’ll put the link in my show notes so can learn more.

Now, I tell you that partly because it's part of my own story and I like to let you guys in on these things and also for a smaller group of you, but still possible, maybe you're looking for a degree program in spiritual formation and this could be the right fit for you. But mostly I tell you this because I know you have your own question marks you're trying to figure out right now. You have your own baskets filled with decisions big and small and sometimes it's helpful to hear how someone else had questions, too.

As for me, the answers haven't presented themselves in a flourish of ta-da's and fanfare of arrivals. No instead, the answers look more like God revealing Himself slowly over time. And in the process, well, I'm coming to know myself better too. Here's to learning together how to listen to his invitation, how to lean on each other when it's hard to hear His voice, and how to simply do our next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 100 of the next right thing. Now, a few questions I'll answer here that you might be wondering about. No, I'm not moving to Kansas. I'm not quitting the podcast or my day job. The best part of this teaching job is it requires me to be in Wichita only for the weeks I need to teach for those four residencies, and the rest of the time I can be home in North Carolina, which is my favorite. So I've basically got the best of both worlds is what I'm saying.

Again, applications are now open for Cohort V. If you're interested in joining us in the fall of 2020 just check out that link in the show notes to learn more or you can visit [friends.edu/csfl](https://friends.edu/csfl) and while you're there in the show notes don't forget to fill out our first-ever Next Right Thing Podcast survey and be entered to win the Amazon gift card. I would love to know more about you and about your listening habits and all of the things.

As we continue to celebrate 100 episodes and 5 million downloads I want to extend a special thank you to Traci Hardy, my former assistant. She worked so hard with me when the podcast first got started and the years following, and now to Leah Jarvis and Ginna Neel who have taken up the reins. They help me continue to bring you these episodes every week. I also want to thank Caleb Peavy and his team at Unmutable who have been doing my sound editing, praise the Lord, since August of this year. I did all that myself for almost two years and suffice it to say, well, I'm a more peaceful human now that that is off my plate.

And again, don't forget to fill out that survey at [emilypfreeman.com/survey](http://emilypfreeman.com/survey). I can't wait to hear from you.

In closing, here's a simple line to remind us of the importance of community to our spiritual formation from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together* where he simply says, "I need the Christ in you, and you need the Christ in me."

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