



108: Walk at Your Own Pace

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 108.

This is a podcast about making decisions but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation or just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

I wasn't planning to do an episode to release on New Year's Eve, but here I am anyway with things to say and words of closure and an invitation for you to say words and close things out as well. If you want a little no shame companionship as you stand between the year you've just lived and the one you're entering into listen in.

This is the time of year when everyone in all the places is talking about goal setting, new starts, reflections, resolutions, top tens, best ofs and beginning again, and I will confess to you I love it all. I love the new year planners and the resolutions and the questions and reflection. Looking back on the year we've had as we stand on tiptoe for the year ahead and I'm not even a little bit cynical about it. I just love it.

Now, as you may know, if you've been around here for a while, I practice monthly, but mainly quarterly and seasonal reflections, which honestly can feel a little bit lonely at the end of March or June when it seems like the world has moved on to talk about other things. Even though I love it, even though it's something that's already a part of my regular rhythm of life, I realize I haven't had much to

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add to the conversation here at the end of this year. Every year around this time, I get a little bit more quiet. At first, this gave me pause. I love this stuff. I should have downloads and blog posts and lists to offer people as tools this week. What is actually wrong with me? I wondered that.

Well, I'm coming to the conclusion that there is nothing wrong with me just as there's nothing wrong with you when your actions don't fit what may seem expected or obvious or when you leave opportunity on the table in favor of something more meaningful to you at the time. You aren't missing out, and neither am I.

When it comes to creativity, personal development, spiritual formation and life with God, your pace is your pace and there's no such thing as behind. As I continue to pay attention to my silence here at the end of the year, I'm welcoming it as a friend. I've also come to this conclusion because I talk about reflection and intention regularly throughout the year. When December and January come around and everyone else talks about it too, I find myself leaning forward to hear what they have to say.

In so many ways, this online world, many of us work and come in and out of every day is a lot like our offline world though we sometimes forget to remember that. If I were to walk into an actual room full of people talking about something that I'm interested in, my natural tendency is to listen and then wait to see if I have anything to add to the conversation. Turns out I've been doing the same thing online as well.

There was a time when I would have majorly judged this tendency of mine and insisted that I make a change, but I'm doing the work of not judging myself or forcing a change, but simply learning to pay attention. So, here on the last day of the month, the last day of the year and the final day of the decade, I'm asking myself as I share these words with you, do I have anything to add?

Like I said, I nearly didn't have an episode for today, but many of us have been spending Tuesdays together for a little over two years now, so if nothing else, it seemed fitting to mark this final Tuesday of the year together as well. So, first, I'll just say it's okay if all you can do right now is pay attention and ask if you have anything to add to the conversation, the debate, the neighborhood, the table or the relationship. If you don't, there's nothing wrong with you. Your voice will come in time. If you do, speak up with confidence, we need what you have to say.

Secondly, as I've asked myself if I have anything to add to this year-end conversation, I've decided that I do. It's a simple observation that I hope will encourage you to walk at your own pace in freedom.

What I've noticed as I've read articles, watched Instagram stories and posts, and paid attention to my own practices and tendencies at this time of year is that while both looking back in reflection and looking ahead with plans are a huge part of the conversation right now, most of us tend to lead with either one or the other. I guess there's a whole group of us who don't look back or look ahead, but most people who just live only in the present all the time aren't the ones having the conversations right now, but of those two groups, those that look back or look ahead, I know that when we talk about it, we tend to elevate our way over the other way and maybe it's even subconscious. There could even be times when we imply that if other people don't do it the way we do it, they're doing it wrong. Well, maybe there is no wrong. I just wonder which one are you?

The question isn't what have you always done or what do your friends do or what does your favorite teacher or author do or what do the experts recommend, but what do you do? In the spirit of learning to walk at our own pace, I wonder which is more natural for you? Do you find it easier to look back and reflect on your life, to assess what worked and what didn't, to learn what you can from the year you've just lived through in order to move with more awareness into the year ahead? Some of us prefer looking back because the past is already set, and there's no uncertainty there. We can account for it. We can look for patterns and collect data without hurry. After all, it's already happened, and it's not going to change.

We can slowly uncover what we need to find in time, or maybe you're more of the opposite where your natural tendency is to focus on renewals and resolutions with lots of goal setting and new habits and dreaming about what comes next. Some of us prefer to look ahead because of the hopeful possibility, the potential for growth and change, and the excitement for what might be just around the corner. Whether you tend to lean backward in reflection or forward in renewal, I raise my glass to you because just as God wove this give and take rhythm into the darkness and the light, the evening and the morning, the summer and the winter, God also wove these rhythms into us.

Some of us more naturally reflect his listening and receiving image while others beautifully embody his

action and that's not to say that we're excused from learning how to listen or learning how to act. It's just to say that we need each other as we go along the way, as a whole body, the church, we learn from each other, catching one another as we stumble along through grief and sorrow, rejoicing with each other as we make progress toward goals both big and small. We don't shame the ones who need more time to reflect, and we don't scold those who look ahead to the next horizon.

As we look back, we let ourselves enjoy the reflection. We give ourselves time to do it the way that's meaningful for us, remembering reflection has no deadline. We give our lives room to speak and say what they need to say, but we also leave room for a question. Though it's more natural for me to look back, what might I learn from looking ahead? What am I afraid of? What might God be inviting me into in the future?

And for those of us who are more forward leaners, we let ourselves find all the joy in the fresh plans and hopeful dreaming, we set our goals with intention and heart and excitement, and we don't let the new year cynics get under our skin. We've got work to do and new habits to try after all, but we also leave room for a question. Though it's more natural for me to look ahead, what might I learn from looking back? What am I afraid of? Where might God wants to meet me in my memory?

We tend to avoid what doesn't come natural for all kinds of reasons, but usually it's because of a fear of what we may or may not find. As we quietly step over the invisible threshold of a new decade, may we learn to walk at our own pace beside those who have things to teach us as they walk at their pace as well. Whether we spend more time looking back or planning ahead, may we together find more laughter and less shame, more love and less fear, more connecting and less competing as we continue to simply do our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 108 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple habit of walking at your own pace can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow because it's true, this is a podcast about making decisions. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

And listen, whether you tend to be a look backer or a plan aheader, my online self-paced class Discern and Decide is a great option to help you do both as you create a rhythm of life that makes sense for you and supports you as you make soulful decisions in the coming year. To enroll in that online course, simply visit emilypfreeman.com and click on “Class” in the top navigation. Again, that’s emilypfreeman.com and just click on “Class” there at the top.

If you didn’t know at the end of every month, I share a secret letter for subscribers only and this year’s letter I’m sharing my own year-end look back at what worked and what didn’t. For the record, I’m a look backer. That comes more natural for me, but over the years, I’m learning the skills it takes to look ahead, and I’m actually really enjoying that more and more with each coming year.

If you’d like to get that secret letter and the letter I send out at the end of every month, simply visit emilypfreeman.com/letter, and it will be delivered into your inbox. Again, that’s emilypfreeman.com/letter, and that’s the note that I send out at the end of every month. Listeners and readers tell me it’s one of their favorite emails, and I hope the same is true for you.

In closing, here’s a prayer by Saint Francis, which is one of my favorites.

“Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love, where there is injury, pardon, where there is doubt, faith, where there is despair, hope, where there is darkness, light, where there is sadness, joy. Oh, divine master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love, for it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.”

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