



131: Start Where You Are

I'm Emily P. Freeman. And welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 131.

This is a podcast about making decisions. It's also a podcast about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the 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 recently shared a short episode called On Racism: Learning to Speak and to Listen. And I've heard from many of you, particularly white listeners who are on a similar journey as I am. You want to listen and you want to learn and maybe you've been doing so for a while, but still there's a question. Okay, so what can I do?

And in that question, it can become quickly overwhelming to know where to start. Well, I speak only as a fellow journeyer. I'm a student here and I don't have easy answers, but I do believe what we talk about here every single week is as relevant now as ever do the next right thing. That's today's episode. Listen in.

The first time I remember someone referring to me as artistic, I was married. We had our three kids and I was in the throws of young motherhood and all the conditions that come along with that. Lack of sleep day/night confusion, foggy brain, spit up shoulder. We were visiting my sister and brother-in-law at their home in Charlotte. And I have this vague memory of playing their upright piano. And I can't remember exactly how it came up or what was said, but somehow in the course of that day, my sister said something to the effect of "Emily is the artistic one in the family."

Looking back on that time. Now nearly 15 years ago, though, at that time, that seems completely foreign to me. What do you mean I'm artistic? I'm not artistic, but I think now I fully embraced my artistic identity. And for the record, I'm not the only artist in the family. I've written an entire book about what it means for every human to uncover the art that's alive within us. But that's for another episode.

I am an artist because I'm created in the image of an artistic God. And the work that I make, the words I write, the way that I mother and speak and listen, well, these are the evidence that I am art. Scripture says in Ephesians 2, that we are God's workmanship. The Greek word is poema where we get our English word poem. We are God's poem. God created us with a word. So when God made art, what happened? We did.

Every single one of us.

As an artist who uses words for a living. I place a high on beautiful words, on metaphor, on lovely ways to say regular things. And I don't think there's anything wrong with that until until the metaphor gets in the way, until it becomes somewhat of a coverup for clarity intentionally or not. And it masks the gravity or seriousness of a situation, a grief, a sorrow, a tragedy, or an injustice.

So let me state this plainly without metaphor or ambiguity, I am working to move from being simply not racist to being actively anti-racist. This is not merely a moment. This is for the long haul.

I know I'm not alone in this pursuit. Aside from what I've seen on the news, from my social media feeds, and the conversations that I've had with my family and my friends, the numbers don't lie. Out of the top 20 bestselling books on Amazon last week, 10 of them were either written by a person of color or were about anti-racism. On The New York Times bestselling paperback books list, the top 10 were books written about race or racism in America. This is good news. We're paying attention, but there is no fast track here.

I have to start where I am, but in order to do that, I have to know where I am. Naming where we are can be one next right step together forward toward justice and toward peace. I can say this next part with clarity. And I know there's going to be some who misunderstand, who want to argue or don't agree. And that's okay. I'm going to still say it.

I am a white woman surrounded by mostly white people in my life. This is not a confession. It is, however, for me, an admission that though life may have been hard for me in many ways and for many reasons, life has not been hard simply because I'm white. We all have hardship and grief and tragedy and difficulty in this world. Lord knows it's true. Every heart knows its own pain, but being white is not something I have to think about.

I don't wish it to be different. I don't talk about it with my white friends. Well, at least I haven't until now. I don't have hard conversations with my children about not wearing hoodies in public. If you have been paying attention to the news, to conversations at your workplace or in your friend groups, you may find yourself having a lot of different reactions and they'll vary from person to person from interaction to interaction. Maybe there's grief, anger, confusion, despair, sorrow, lament, indifference, or fatigue. My encouragement here, if you're still listening is the same as it always is.

Don't push away any emotion or fear or confusion that you might be experiencing. Don't try to change it, sugarcoat it, hide it, manipulate it. Let it be what it is, face it, honestly. Name it fully, and then take it to God. Ask him how to move from the swirl of the feelings within you and turn it into action against racism in our society.

That's what I'm learning to do. As you think about your own experience, name what comes to mind because starting where we are means admitting that we are watching this from the outside. We're actually in this with our brothers and sisters. So let's be in it with intention without being overcome by it. Remember the goal is not to debate, to argue, to convince or deny. The goal is oneness, unity with God and with others. In the words of author, Deidra Riggs, oneness is not about conforming. Oneness is about transforming. She goes on to say, and I'm quoting her from her book. That's simply called one. She says,

“The fact that our individual journey is uniquely customized to us cannot be overstated. As many people as there ever will be. That’s exactly how many different journeys there are to reconcile us to a life of freedom and oneness with God.”

Deidra’s not saying there are many different roads to God, but that each one of us is on our own journey on that road. And it’s going to look different and unique to us because we are each unique. So don’t be afraid to start where you are and don’t be afraid to move forward from it.

Let’s keep growing. Let’s continue to listen. Let’s continue to learn. It’s okay to be a beginner. It’s okay to start where you are. It’s okay to speak up at your small table to call out injustice when you see it, and to stand on the side of love. It’s okay to say, I don’t know. It’s okay to stumble through this, but it’s not okay to quit. You are loved. You are safe. You are not alone. As you work toward healing, peace and justice for all by simply doing the next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 131 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of starting where you are can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because while it’s true, this is a podcast about making decisions. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

Speaking of starting where you are at my friend, Rashaun Copeland has a book titled start where you are and it’s releasing in September of 2020. I met Rashaun in 2016 when we traveled to Israel together. And then I had the privilege of meeting his wife a few months ago. These two are pure delight. You can find them both at copelandministries.org and learn more about Rashaun and his book at startwhereyouarebook.com.

As always, you can find me at Instagram [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman) and online emilypfreeman.com, where we always provide a transcript for every single episode, either for you, if you prefer reading to listening, but also for our deaf and hard of hearing friends who would otherwise not have access to an audio offering.

Well, how about we end with a favorite quote from our friend, James Bryan Smith, a good and beautiful reminder that we all need to hear.

I am one in whom Christ dwells and delights. I live in the strong and unshakable kingdom of God. The kingdom is not in trouble and neither am I.

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