



149: Help for Staying Grounded During Election Season

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 149. This is a podcast about making decisions, but also 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 while you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

With an important presidential election coming up in the United States in just a few short weeks, I would be remiss to ignore the fact that we're preparing to make decisions that don't only impact us and our own households, but also the people who live all over this beautiful country and all over the world. I won't talk specifically about policy or issues, but I do want to talk about people and discernment.

But before we start, I want to share a story with you about stamps.com, a new sponsor of the next right thing. Over the course of this year, many things have changed about our normal routines, including how we stay in touch via handwritten notes, surprise thinking of you, packages and mailing shipments for our businesses. Luckily there's stamps.com to make things easier. With stamps.com, you can print postage on demand from your own device to send through the United States postal service or UPS. Just weigh your package, print your postage, leave it for your mail carrier or schedule a pickup. It's that simple.

Now you may not know this, but for the last 10 months or so, my fellow hope*writers co-founders and I have a mentoring, a group of 26 hope writers who were part of our first cohort mastermind. Back in June, we sent them a curated gift from us, and stamps.com made the shipping seamless. I was able to weigh the boxes and print all the shipping labels from my home printer without a hitch. It was so simple. I will forever sing the praises of stamps.com, and just in time for the holiday season, Next Right Thing listeners can get a special offer that includes a four-week trial plus free postage and a digital scale without any long-term commitment. Simply visit stamps.com, click the microphone at the top and type Next Right Thing. That's stamps.com and enter Next Right Thing.

Now onto today's episode.

I spent a week up in Michigan a few weeks back. When I left home, the leaves in North Carolina were just beginning to shift their shade. But then when I came back home, several of my favorite trees in town were well into their autumnal transformation. Driving through our neighborhood, nearly every yard was either scattered with leaves, political signs, orange pumpkins, or some combination of all three. Here in the

United States, the evidence of election season is fully upon us.

I believe as citizens, it's our responsibility to care, to learn and to vote. Over the past several weeks, I've watched as strangers, friends and mentors have shared their political stances in person, online on Instagram and Facebook and blog posts, and on video. I've nodded along at times. And I shook my head at other times, but one thing I'm seeing that I thought would be worth talking about here in this space is the way in which we're all working to discern not only how to vote, but also how to interact with those who felt differently than we do.

I'm not the person to debate policy or to try to educate anyone about politics. But I do know some things about discernment. For three years, I've talked weekly about decision making, how to consider the facts, the feelings, and the implications of our choices. And I know how difficult it can be to make a wise, thoughtful decision.

When you feel pressure, anxiety and heartbreak on every side, what are some parameters that we can count on during the swirling emotions, opinions, and implications of election season? How can we discern our next right thing in the midst of all the noise?

I have fully and firmly made up my mind in this coming election, but I know some of you haven't. For years, I've said that the way in which we make decisions is just as important as the decisions we make. That doesn't change when we talk about politics. So here are five mantras that I've been holding onto to help me stay grounded during election season.

The first mantra comes from Brad Montague, the guy behind Kid President. He says, "Be who you needed when you were younger."

As you engage in political conversation, whether that be in person or online, consider the kind of grownup you needed when you were younger. And then as much as you're able, be that kind of grownup for yourself and for others.

Did you need someone to stand up for you? Stand up for others. Did you need someone to listen to you? Be a listener to others. Did you wish someone would just tell it to you straight? Well, maybe you need to be direct.

I wish we had more examples of grownups who talk about heart issues with grace, understanding and acknowledgment of the nuance. But the truth is we don't have very many examples of that. Maybe we are to be what we long to see. Maybe this is on us.

The second mantra comes from Loretta Berry, who I quote here often. And maybe you can say this one with me, "May we be people of peace with voices of hope, doing the hard work of love."

Being a voice of hope doesn't mean we Pollyanna our way through. It doesn't mean we soften the hard edges of truth or jump over all the difficulty without pity.

Well, God is in control. Yes, God is with us, but we never want to cheapen true statements about God by using them as a way of shutting other people down. Scripture is full of people who trusted God as they

spoke truth to power. At the same time, the hard work of love sometimes means to hold our tongue and listen to an opinion that differs from our own not because we're going to be convinced and not because we agree. Because we love that person and we want to work together to claim some relational land for unity.

This third mantra comes from a slogan on a T-shirt that Shannan Martin told me about and it stopped me in my tracks: "Be careful who you hate. It could be someone you love."

You have a circle of people around you. I don't know how big your circle is, but it includes your immediate and extended family. The people with whom you work, the people who go to your church, your book club, your neighbors, your kids, friends, parents, your friends on Facebook and Instagram. When you think about your circle, no matter how big or how small, I hope you'll consider two things. Each person in my circle is made in the image of God. And each person has a broken heart. Always assume people are struggling more than they let on because someone in your circle has had an abortion. Someone in your circle is gay and hasn't told anyone. Someone in your circle is doubting their faith. Someone in your circle has done something they deeply regret. Someone in your circle has been sexually assaulted. Someone in your circle has been discriminated against. Someone in your circle has a secret they feel like they can't tell anyone. Maybe one of these someones is you. Be the person in the circle who carries compassion, who's willing to listen, and who doesn't have to have the last word. Be careful who you hate, because it could be someone you love.

Number four: The kingdom of God is not in trouble, and neither are you.

If you're struggling to reconcile the certainties of your younger self as they collide with the questions of your grownup self, and you feel like to listen to one is to betray the other then, I just want to say, "The kingdom of God is not in trouble and neither are you."

God can handle your questions, your heartbreak, and what may be for you a changing narrative. This may not be your story, but if it is your story, hang in there. You're not alone.

Finally. Number five: Set your own boundaries.

This means knowing what is mine and knowing what is not mine. This means knowing, naming, and respecting my responsibility for educating myself and casting an informed vote, but also understanding the impact of constant consumption on my mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing, as well as the impact on my work and my family responsibilities. It means thinking before I post, pausing before I comment, and always having a posture of prayer.

Setting boundaries will risk misunderstandings. People don't often like it when we set boundaries, but how someone responds to your boundary is outside the realm of your responsibility. Because setting a boundary is a steadfast refusal to pick up what is not mine. Even if someone continues to try to manipulate me to do so, even if someone else thinks I should. I know my boundaries and I trust you to know yours.

In closing, I've been moved by a conversation between Krista Tippett, host of the podcast *On Being* and Arlie Hochschild, author and creator of *The Field of Sociology of Emotion*. She teaches on the social impact of emotion, submitting that our stories are felt rather than merely factual. And those stories shape our lives together. This can not be separated from the political landscape. She says, quote, "We all need

to be makers. If you want to make a social contribution and help build a public conversation about the big issues of the day, you have to really be good at emotion management. It's a contribution to the larger whole to be really good at that."

Again, if you're interested in that episode about the importance of not just the facts, but also having an emotional intelligence during election season, that's episode 82 of On Being.

We don't make decisions in empty rooms. We're always surrounded by some who endear us. Some who bother us and others who were bothered by us. So how can we move forward toward election day? Let's keep one another in mind as we vote. And as we talk about voting, let's be who we needed when we were younger. Let's be people of peace with voices of hope who do the hard work of love. Let's be careful who we hate remembering it could be someone we love. Let's remember the kingdom is not in trouble and neither are we, but let's never use that truth to shut down important nuanced conversation. Let's set healthy boundaries and respect the boundaries of others as we do our next right thing.

Thanks for listening to episode 149 of The Next Right Thing. I hope these simple mantras for staying grounded 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.

Want even more perspective on how to make decisions during a stressful season? Check out episode 103, all about what Mr. Rogers has to teach us about making decisions.

As always, you can find me in a transcript of every episode emilypfreeman.com. And you can find me on Instagram [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman).

Before we go, as you may know, The Next Right Thing recently joined the That Sounds Fun Podcast Network. Being part of a network helps offset the cost of producing this show, but it also helps us all discover new voices and shows.

That could be the perfect addition to our podcast listening routines. One show I'm excited to share with you is a newer one called Be The Bridge. I know, I know. You're probably thinking Emily, that's a book. You talk about it all the time. Well, yes, it is a book, but bestselling author, Latasha Morrison started the Be The Bridge podcast earlier this year to continue the work she started in her book. It's a biweekly show where she talks to authors, advocates, activists, and more to demonstrate just how important conversations can cultivate real change when it comes to racial justice. Recently, she interviewed author Joe Saxton, TV producer Shannon Doyle Bell, and author Beth Moore just to name a few. Be The Bridge is a great show, and I'm excited to share a network with Latasha. New episodes release every other Tuesday, and you can find them by searching, Be The Bridge in your podcast app of choice or by visiting bethebridge.com.

Well, that's all I've got for this week. Thanks so much for listening and I'll see you next time.