



180: Use Your Voice

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 180.

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, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

Before we get started, let's chat about this episode sponsor, Talkspace. In a lot of ways, we're rounding the corner on a year of anxiety, fear, and isolation, but as restrictions lift and our favorite places open up, it can still feel like a lot to process. That's why Talkspace wants to help us take what we learned during the pandemic and head in a new direction with online therapy. Talkspace is the number one online therapy platform that has thousands of licensed therapists trained in over 40 specialties, including anxiety, depression, relationships, anger management, and more. And with their latest end-to-end bank-grade encryption technology, you can decide whether to text, send a video, or share a voice message and feel confident knowing what you tell your therapist is shared securely and complies with HIPAA regulations.

Personally, I love that they've made it easy to sign up and start therapy on the same day, and it's a fraction of the cost of in-person therapy. Instead of waiting for an appointment, you can send unlimited messages to your therapist, and they'll engage with you daily, five days a week. As a listener of The Next Right Thing, you can get \$100 off of your first month with Talkspace. To match with a licensed therapist today, go to [Talkspace.com](https://www.talkspace.com), or download the app. Make sure to use code NEXTRIGHTTHING, all one word, to get \$100 off your first month. That's NEXTRIGHTTHING at [Talkspace.com](https://www.talkspace.com).

Now, on to today's episode. Listen in.

I sat at the old kitchen table my dad used as a desk in the basement corner, his black and white typewriter whispering invitation. Even at 12 years old, I knew the power of those keys. That typewriter held stories, more than I could tell in a lifetime. But I spent the summer of '89 chasing them down anyway. I wrote of a creature named Milo who lived in the walls. I wrote of magical flowers that never wilted. I wrote of divorce, fear, fairies, and relationships. In the fall of 1991, I sat midway to the back of Ms. Smith's English class. Her gray curls were cropped short to her head, and rimless glasses perched high up on her nose. Her calf-length skirt and sensible shoes painted her a nearly perfect portrait of an English teacher. She always wore a smile.

I remember one afternoon when the class was almost over, I sat waiting for her to hand back our term papers. I think mine was about ferrets, or it could have been Edna St. Vincent Millay. She walked past my desk, placed my paper face down in front of me, and continued passing out the rest. I turned it over and saw the A in the upper left corner. Just beneath that, she wrote in her own handwriting words of encouragement, the particulars of which I regret to say I can't remember. But I do remember I took that paper home, and I showed it to my mom. I also remember my mom stuck that paper to our fridge with two South Carolina-shaped magnets. I always made good grades on essays.

Early in my college days, I took an English class taught by a professor who was rumored to be the toughest in the department. He walked into class on the first day dressed in faded jeans, tennis shoes, and a rumpled sweater. His hair was wild. His beard was unruly. He looked as though he had better things to do. The first gruff words out of his mouth I'll never forget. He said, "It is impossible to make an A in my class. The best among you will make a C. The rest of you will fail. That is, if you don't drop out first." Well, it was a dare, and I was thrilled. The A I received in his class remains my most hard-earned one. In fact, he told me at the end of the year that if I ever needed a recommendation for anything, he would gladly give me one. I never took him up on it. I have to tell you, I don't even remember his name, but I do remember his influence.

After receiving such encouraging feedback from eighth grade all the way into college on my writing, I did the most natural thing a young writer would do. I chose to major in piano. But since I didn't love piano enough to get super better, I did the next natural thing a young writer would do. I dropped my piano major, and I started to study sign language interpreting. Naturally. It's just the perfect next choice, right? Well, actually, it makes more sense than you think. I share that story in my book, *A Million Little Ways*. And it's good for me to be reminded of it.

When hints of your own design scare you, one choice you might make is to run. I've done it over and over again, not just in writing but also in other areas of life. I've stayed silent when I've known that I'm to speak out. I've stayed still even when I felt compelled to move. When hints of my own potential show up in me, I haven't always welcomed it, but I'm starting to. And in recent years, I've done it more and more. And I have to tell you, it feels like waking up.

While some of us are naturally assertive, others are more naturally withdrawn. And while each come with gifts, they also come with their own burdens. I hope we can all benefit from this reminder to pay attention to places where we're afraid of our own potential and also to pay attention to our own voice, to how the spirit of God might want to move within and around us. But today, especially for you, if you find yourself leaning back even though you think it's time to lean forward, well, I hope you'll pay close attention. First, there's nothing wrong with you. Second, there's still blessing, giftedness, leadership, and strength all the way in the back, all the way on the sidelines and in the shadows. You don't have to be in the spotlight in order to make a difference, and you certainly don't have to have big dreams in order to have purpose and joy. I really hope you don't hear me saying that because I don't think that's true.

But what I am saying is that if you sense a calling, an invitation, a beckoning to move forward into your next right thing, and that next right thing is unexpected or scary, don't be so quick to doubt it. Along those lines, I wanted to read a blessing I wrote a few weeks ago for the one who is finally using her voice.

We've been waiting for you. For so long, you've been doing the sacred work, watching, listening, and paying good attention. We need more of you in the world. Now is the time to tell us what you see here and notice. In the telling, you get to be you. Bring to us your unique contribution. Yes, you have one. We're so glad you're finally beginning to believe it. So raise your delicate glass of nuance, and we'll raise ours, too. Together, we'll gently toast to beauty and justice as we find a hopeful way forward through the fog together. There are so many of us here with you. Don't be afraid.

Thanks for listening to episode 180 of *The Next Right Thing*.

I hope this simple practice of using your voice, especially when you're afraid of your own potential 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 making our lives. Now, as always, you can find me @EmilyPFreeman on Instagram or at EmilyPFreeman.com. But I also want to say, if you could relate to my story of writing, listen in. This week, Hope Writers has opened wide the doors for new members to join our community. We only open our doors three times a year.

If you want to know more about Hope Writers, what we are and who we serve, visit [HopeWriters.com/Join](https://www.hopewriters.com/join) to learn more, where you'll find out all about our training, our writing community, our guided hope circles, and our brand new Hope Writers Progress Planner, which is a ring-bound, beautiful planner, designed by us to help you make progress in your writing over 90 days' time. It's available only for members of Hope Writers. You can learn all about that and how we at Hope Writers can help you learn to balance the art of writing with the business of publishing. And let me tell you, when we started Hope Writers over five years ago, we had little more than a dream and a good idea. And now here we are, over 3,500 writers strong. We believe words can change the world, and we think you believe that, too.

If you'd like to help make that pivot from writing in secret to writing for a reader, we'd love to have you join us. Visit [HopeWriters.com/Join](https://www.hopewriters.com/join) to join us and learn more, but do it soon because Friday, May 28th is your last chance this season. While Hope Writers is for any writer who wants to make progress and wants to share their words of hope with a reader. It's not only for writers who write words of faith. We have writers from all walks of life, worldviews, and beliefs. But I do want to, in closing, share a few words from a God perspective about the creative work that we're called to do in the world.

This is from my book, *A Million Little Ways*. God is not a technician. God is an artist. This is the God who made you, the same God who lives inside you. God comes into us, then comes out of us in a million little ways. That's why there's freedom even in the blah, hope even in the dark, love even in the fear, trust even as we face our critics. In believing in the midst of all that, it feels like strength and depth and wildflowers spinning. It feels risky and brave and underdog winning. It feels like redemption. It feels like art.

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