



96: Listen to Your Crazy Ideas

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 96. 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 great at making decisions but in your current season of life, you could use a little reminder to simply do the next right thing, well then you're in the right place.

I've said it before that this idea of doing the next right thing, well I didn't make that up. It's a phrase that's been repeated and passed down by the greats like Mother Teresa, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Theodore Roosevelt, Elizabeth Elliott, Anne Lamott. Those are only a few. It's a guideline for living in Alcoholics Anonymous. It's become a common catchphrase for coaches and athletes, in boardrooms, and corporate motivational speeches.

It's often the simplest phrases that have the power to change our lives. Like, "I love you," and "I'm sorry," and "You're not alone."

For me and for so many others, "Just do the next right thing" is one of those life changing phrases as well. Not because it's so fancy, because it's so simple. Since adults make over 35,000 decisions every single day — you heard that right. It's no wonder that this idea of doing the next right thing feels like such a relief. When the problems of life feel big and the way through them seems impossible, the last thing we want to do is to consider what we most want or to look desire in the face. But what if clues to our next right thing are embedded in the last place we feel free to look? Listen in.

In the winter of 2012, I found myself at home alone. When you have three kids and a self-employed husband, and empty house is not something that comes around often anyway, but an empty house at night, that's the rarest kind of empty house there is.

The Grammys were on that night, and while I typically prefer the Emmys and the Golden Globes and the Oscars, watching the Grammys felt like my next right thing that night. A lot of the show was just background noise for me, but every now and then something would catch my attention. Like when Foo Fighters won for best rock performance, and while accepting the award, Dave Grohl said this:

“To me, this award means a lot because it shows that the human element of making music is what's most important. It's not about being perfect. It's not about sounding absolutely correct. It's not about what goes on in the computer. It's about what goes on in your head and what goes on in your heart.”

Well, I guess that's easy to say while you're holding a Grammy, but he's not wrong. I remember that with the exception of Adele – Adele is always the exception – nobody performed perfectly at the Grammys that night. Perfect wasn't what got them there, but there they were in all their imperfect glory at the Grammys performing. So what did get them there?

Well, earlier that night, I watched the pre-show, too. You know, where everybody arrives and they've got crazy, wonderful, beautiful outfits on. Well as the musicians arrived and walked the red carpet into the theater, they passed scores of interviewers holding microphones out. One interviewer asked one of the bands, and I don't remember who the interviewer was or which band it was, but one of the interviewers asked the band member what was their secret?

And their answer? “We just keep chasing our craziest ideas.” Crazy ideas don't always mean a ticket to the Grammys, but maybe tickets to the Grammys only come to those who first chased a crazy idea.

Now, that might seem weird coming from me. After all, I am the author who writes about the importance of small things, of noticing the sacred and the ordinary. I wrote a whole book about the regular day of Tuesday and about not despising the days of small beginnings, as it says in Zechariah 4:10.

What about the sacredness of our ordinary place? What about the beauty of small things? Well, all of that is still true, but what is also true is we have a God who brings sacred into everything, both the daily dishes and the miracle at Cana. He is singular and he is plural, stable-born and kingdom ruling.

Have you ever seen an octopus? The fingernails of a baby? The Grand Canyon? A kangaroo? God is the origin of crazy ideas. But we are not God, and so it's true sometimes our dreams and ideas, our desires, they can feel so overwhelmingly big that we're paralyzed to know where to begin, what to do first and how to get from where we are to where we hope to one day be. That's the gift of the next right thing. All big ideas start with one small next step. Focusing on the next right thing helps us to be grounded and present, but it's not meant to keep us in the same place forever. As we begin to embrace our own sense of place in time, we may be more open to considering our crazy ideas. What if you allow yourself, just for the length of this episode even, to consider your crazy ideas?

I think perhaps everybody has crazy ideas, but most people are afraid to consider them. I guess there are those rare few who pursue them, but they wouldn't realize it because to them, they aren't crazy ideas. They're just regular ol' ideas. But if you have a dream tucked away in your back pocket, maybe it's time to bend your ear toward the craziest of your ideas and listen to what they have to say. Over the years, that dream may have taken on many different names in your mind. Silly, ridiculous, hobby, foolish, impossible, waste of time. You've called it names for so long. Perhaps you've never actually taken the time to consider how it got there in your pocket in the first place.

Listen, if something's trashed, we throw it out. We don't put trash in our pockets. Your dream is still there because at one time, you saw its value and so you tucked it away for safekeeping, but doubt and fear and time and have convinced you to keep it hidden, convinced you to rename that dream wrong or stupid or crazy.

What would it take for you to pull your dream out again and to stop taunting it with cruel names? What would it take for you to simply listen to what it has to say? No filters, no backtalk, no eye-rolling. Dare to handle it, to hold it in your hands and consider it with kindness and compassion. You may not be sure what's going to come of that dream, but might you be willing to develop a small but respectable amount of reverence for the way God speaks to you through your desires?

Because here's the thing. What you want is what you want, whether or not you're willing to admit it. If you don't acknowledge it, it's going to come out sideways in the form of frustration, discontentment, anger, anxiety, sadness, or fear. What if your next right thing is to quiet the voice of discouragement and critique inside your own head and consider for a minute or ten?

What is your crazy idea?

Again, crazy ideas don't always mean a ticket to the Grammys, but maybe tickets to the Grammys only come to those who first chased a crazy idea. Same goes for the Oscar winner, the moon walker, the airplane flyer, the actor, president, the single mom with a little book about a boy wizard named Harry. And then there was the pregnant virgin, the shepherd king, the baby savior, the clear water turning Merlot red while the guests laughed and danced into the night.

And then there's you. What is your moon? Your airplane, your boy wizard book? What is your brave lyric, your odd first chapter, your new business motto? What is your crazy idea? Not your perfect idea, not your logical, well-planned, Powerpointed, practical idea. There's a place for those, too, but many times the best and most logical ideas, well, they started out a little bit crazy.

And so now may you be brave enough to acknowledge what you most long for and be willing to expose desire in the light of the love of God. May you see all the ways you resemble God as you bear his image in the world and how he continues to show up in your crazy ideas to reflect in you the kingdom you're made to live in. May you be willing to listen and to consider how what you hear reveals evidence of your unique design.

What is your crazy idea and what should you do with it? Maybe your next right thing is to chase it.

Thanks for listening to Episode 96 of The Next Right Thing. Alright, so I can hear the protests from here and they all begin with the same two words: "Yeah, but ...". Maybe you're thinking, "Yeah, but you don't know my current situation." Or "Yeah, but you can't possibly understand. Yeah, but I don't have the time or the money or the talent or the support."

Listen, your “Yeah, but”’s might be legitimate and they may be substantial, but do you know what else is legitimate and substantial? The kingdom of God, your calling in the world, your place at the table.

I’m not here to say listening to your crazy idea will lead to big things. It might not, but what I truly believe is that at least listening to your crazy idea is often the thing that will lead you home to your greatest contribution and the place where God wants to meet with you.

A word to those of you who have the crazy idea to write a book or somehow share your words with a reader, here’s something for you. One question I get asked a lot is this: “Hey, can I pick your brain about writing and publishing?” For years after I published my first few books, I answered weekly emails from writers wondering how to go from writing in a journal to writing for a reader. Even with all the information available in books and online on the internet, I mean we’ve got the internet! But here’s what I’ve discovered. People don’t just want information. If they did, the internet would suffice. Instead, we want connection. We want to be able to ask our actual specific questions about writing and about publishing and the writing life and have someone say, “No, Emily, you are not, in fact, crazy,” and “Yes, Emily, this writing life is a worthy calling.”

So that’s why we started Hope*Writers. Four years ago, we started this online membership community where we help writers find and follow their own path to publication. By the way, by publication, we just mean sharing your work with the reader. We only open our doors a few times a year and the time is now. We’re open from now until Friday at midnight, October 4th, when we’ll close enrollment until next year. If you feel like your crazy idea might have to do with writing but you have no idea where to start, well now’s the time to join us.

Visit hopewriters.com to learn more. That’s hopewriters.com to join us now where you’ll discover where you are on that writing path – by the way, you’re already on it – and what it takes to get to the next step. I hope to see you inside at hopewriters.com.

Well, I hope you’ve given your crazy idea a little room to breathe today. As you do, you may question what to do next. The truth is in this kind of work, there’s often a lot of waiting involved. You face your crazy idea and it feels like a sprint, but then you stop. Or you take a step forward and then there’s a tiny step back and then a lot of waiting in between.

Toward that end, in closing, here are a few words from Margaret Guenther in her book, *Holy Listening*.
“As a people, we are not comfortable with waiting. We see it as wasted time and try to avoid it or at least fill it with trivial busy-ness. We value action for its own sake. It’s hard to trust in the slow work of God.”

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