



188: You Are Here (And It Matters)

Henri Nouwen writes in his book *Here and Now*, “We are inclined to think that when we are sad, we cannot be glad. But in the life of a God-centered person, sorrow and joy can exist together. That isn’t easy to understand. But when we think about some of our deepest life experiences, such as being present at the birth of a child or the death of a friend, great sorrow and great joy are often seen to be parts of the same experience.”

I’m Emily P. Freeman and welcome to *The Next Right Thing*. You’re listening to episode 188.

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, well you’re in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step. If you’re new around here, you’ll need to know that I have made peace with the fact that part of my job is to repeat myself. And if you’re old around here, you already know it full well. One thing I’ve learned in my own work is that people aren’t so interested in new, not as much as we think, but we do want true. And that’s something I work hard to deliver because there’s this outside life that we live, but there’s also an inner life that’s living in us. Invisible things are real, and it all matters.

As we move through this month, if you’re feeling swept along, hurried up or even passed on by, this episode is for you. It’s time to recalibrate a bit, to pay attention to what’s happening on the inside so we can do our next right thing in love. Listen in.

My first plane ride was on a senior trip with our class to Disney World. And what I remember most as the plane started down the runway was how at first it felt just like a car until it didn’t feel like a car anymore. We were going way too fast and this vehicle is way too big. What is actually happening? It was such a strange experience, that very first plane ride. Well, that was also the year I left the country for the first time. We took a train across the border from Detroit into Canada to see the Phantom of The Opera with our senior class. A train to Canada, a plane to Florida, all within a few months of each other. This was a V big year in my life. Although Canada was my very first international trip. Since then, I’ve traveled to various places all over this country, as well as other countries. I have the pictures and a lot of journaling reflection to prove it, but here’s something I deeply regret about almost every single one of those trips.

Looking back, I didn’t always know exactly where I was. I mean, physically where I was in the world. I

know where we flew into and out of, I know landmarks and memorable sites like the Dead Sea in Israel, the Statue of David was in Florence, Westminster Abbey in London and CS Lewis's house outside of Oxford. But I didn't pay close attention to all the other small towns that we passed through. The places we stopped and ate, or slept, or visited, cities where we stayed even. I mostly regret this in Israel where the air was heavy with history and meaning and I was soaking it all in so deeply in my heart, I forgot to pay actual attention to where we really were. I was in my head and the truth is I have to work hard to be grounded and rooted in my body, where I actually am in space and time.

And that's not just when I'm traveling, this can also be a daily thing for me. Maybe you can relate. I thought about this over the summer, when the US government released documents admitting the existence of basically UFO's. And then several weeks later, all the billionaires went to space and back in an afternoon, and the collective world hardly batted an eyelash about it. And I thought, okay, well maybe we're all living inside of our heads. Maybe we're just too tired to be shocked or astonished anymore by anything. I don't even know.

Well, back in 2012, I spent a week in Colorado for some spiritual direction training and our teacher, Dr. Larry Crabb asked us to go around and introduce ourselves on the very first night. And I'm sure you've been in situations like this before, where this happens when you're invited to introduce yourself. And for me, I started to rehearse my credentials in my mind, what I was going to share and what I was going to tell the people who don't know me, what do I want them to know? But when he explained next, what was going to happen? He said, we wouldn't be sharing what we do, but where we are. Like the map that you see when you go to the mall or outside of the rest stop, we stand in front of it to get our bearings. And the first thing we look for is that small red dot that says you are here. As it turned out, Larry Crabb did not care if we had written a book or taught a math class or were the president of something really important. He wanted to know, where are you right now?

That's what mattered in that space. He asked us, "What's your red dot? What is true right now? The state of your mind, heart, will and imagination? And then also the state of your body, your surroundings, your place in the world today." And so wherever you're listening, whenever you're listening, here you are. Like Nouwen said, "We are sad and we are glad." And I'll add, we are here. We can make this complicated. Sometimes the place where you are physically does not match the place where you are emotionally or mentally.

That's why we get frustrated when we're on vacation and we're looking out at the sea and it's all so beautiful, but we can't enjoy it because we're thinking about a deadline looming when we get back home. Or it's why we kick ourselves for spacing out during those two precious hours that we had to work before our roommates or the kids tumble back in from school or work or wherever they've been. Or how we can know that we are right now at the grocery store. And 10 minutes ago, I was at my house, but I do not at all remember the drive that it took me to get from there to here. Well, in these situations, we might describe them as feeling scattered. So what might it look like to live gathered again?

It starts by being where you are. You are one person and you occupy many places. You carry worlds inside you, but really we can only make our decisions from the place where we are right now. So where are you right now? If you're carrying a decision, if you're longing for discernment, if you feel rushed, anxious, or tension on the inside, where are you now? What day of the week is it? What time of day is it now? What did you do just before this? What will you do just after? Who have you spoken with today? Who will you

see next? Where are you today? Are you home or away? And also, where are you today? Are you calm, content, at peace? Are you anxious, worried, or sad? Are you feeling hopeful, lost, motivated, defeated?

What if you being all the way here actually mattered, with your cold feet and your stomach ache and the light shining through the window. You with your stack of books, by the bedside table and hopeful feeling inside your heart. You with your deep grief, over a loss you thought you'd be over by now, standing in the kitchen while you microwave your coffee. You are here. For now, this is true. So what is true of you? And do you really believe God is with you no matter what? That you are not alone, that you don't have to be you all by yourself? Here's to being where you already are. Fully present with all that is true. And then here's to doing your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 188 of The Next Right Thing. I hope the simple practice of just being 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, you know the bigger truth is our daily decisions are actually making our lives. As always, you can find me @EmilyPFreeman on Instagram or online at emilypfreeman.com, where you can also find a transcript of this episode, as well as every episode we've done so far. Well in closing, here's that quote again from the top of the episode. I'll read it as well as a little bit more from Henri Nouwen's book, Here and Now.

“We're inclined to think that when we are sad, we cannot be glad, but in the life of a God-centered person, sorrow and joy can exist together. That isn't easy to understand. But when we think about some of our deepest life experiences, such as being present at the birth of a child or the death of a friend, great sorrow and great joy are often seen to be parts of the same experience. Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God, our refuge and our safety, and that nothing, not even death can take God away from us.” Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.