



209: Find Life After the Death of A Dream with Scott Erickson

I'm Emily P. Freeman. And welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 209. 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 discerning your next right thing. What do you do when you feel like your life hasn't turned out the way you thought it would, or the way you wanted it to? How do you keep going in the face of personal or vocational disappointment? Well, my guest today has spent a lot of time not only think his way through the answer to that question, but he's lived his way through it and has brought us along through his own stories, questions, humor, compelling art. And now his brand new book, Say Yes.

Visual artist and spiritual director, Scott Erickson, as some may know as Scott the Painter, is intimately familiar with the death of a dream and is now sharing practices and pivots that have helped him discover the surprising life that can be found beyond that death. Our conversation is less prescriptive and more of a poetic meandering. And I love every minute of it. Scott is an artist and a human I have enjoyed from a distance for several years now. So I've been looking forward to this conversation for a long time, especially after having finished reading, Say Yes. I got an early copy of this one and I read it from front to back, circling and underlining all along the way. If you're listening to this in real time, the book releases one week from today and you can pre-order it now and have it in your hands by this time next week. If you're experiencing, or have experienced the death of a dream and you aren't sure what to do next, I hope you'll listen in.

Emily:

Scott, I'm thrilled to have you join me today. Thanks so much for being here.

Scott:

I'm so glad to be here.

Emily:

It's super fun. Well, here, first question. When people first meet you or you meet people at your kid's birthday party and they're like, "Hey, dude. So what do you do?" Tell us what is your answer to the stranger at the kid's birthday party?

Scott:

Yeah, usually, I mean, I say, “I make my living as a professional artist,” which then there’s usually no change in their face. It’s just bewilderment. So, I say, “The way that I do that is I’m a painter/illustrator. I’m an author and I hope to continue making books.” And I’m pretty artsy-fartsy. I do some performing arts, which means I tour around and do these storytelling events. And I was like, “I do a lot of little things that makes a little something,” is what I like to say.

Emily:

Do you ever get a typical answer from that? A typical response from that? Or is it across the board when you give people that answer?

Scott:

People are pretty jazzed about it. Yeah. I mean, I think there’s a myriad of ways of being an adult nowadays. So, sometimes you meet people who are butting up against this... I remember talking to this... granted, they were an older couple, but I mentioned I was an artist and they’re like, “Oh, it’s really hard to make a living as an artist nowadays.” And I was like, “Actually, it’s kind of the only way to make a living nowadays.” You’re talking about, I mean, you’re talking about all those manufacturing jobs that there are all those... What has happened in our workforce is we’ve shifted to, how are you going to problem solve? How are you going to think about design and storytelling? These are the jobs nowadays. So, the fact that I just do it independently means I’ve just built up my areas of streams of revenue to where it’s sustainable.

Scott:

And we could talk about that if you want to. Yeah, I mean, I had to get real serious five or six years ago, and just was like, how do you make money as an artist? And what is the service I provide? So, and then because of a global pandemic, one of those streams can go away. The year before the pandemic, touring and doing shows was my main source of income. And then that went away for a year and a half, if not two years. And thankfully, there’s a book. And thankfully, I had been building an art store and sales. And so yeah, just things like that. We all need to be diverse in what we’re doing, I guess, but.

Emily:

My son is 15 and he said the other day, “Mom, do that to be a millionaire, you have to have seven streams of revenue?” I was like, “I feel like it probably takes more than just that.” Because you can have seven really crummy streams of revenue, but.

Scott:

Absolutely.

Emily:

But I appreciated the insight that he may have gotten from TikTok. I don’t know.

Scott:

The dispenser of wisdom. Yeah, right?

Emily:

I know we’re not necessarily here to talk about all your streams of revenue, although I would love to have that conversation, because I think it’s fascinating. And I’ve heard you say before there’s certain areas that kind of jazz you, that when they intersect, that’s kind of where you like to hang out. For me, that’s really

spiritual formation, creativity, sort of on the corner of those things is where I kind of like to sit and look at the world. And I think there's a lot of similarities, maybe in the work that you do. Would you say that's fairly accurate?

Scott:

Yeah. I think that's really accurate. I'm interested in... So, I just think that all kind of conversations eventually become a spiritual conversation. Now, there are industries built around professional religious people and I don't consider myself in that industry. Does that make sense? I think you can... there are certain kind of speakers or bands or whatever, that can find a way and they all kind of say a similar thing. And I am just really interested in the meeting of comedy and spirituality. I'm really interested in... at the beginning of the book, which is kind of in the show, the show... My publisher thought the book might be a little harsh, but in the show I say at the very beginning, my show, Say Yes, which is like this multimedia storytelling event, I say, "We're all here. And what we know about being here is that life is a mixture of sacred moments and dick jokes at the same time. Now you can't go to the comedy club and be too sacred, nor can you go to the sacred place and be too crass. And I understand both of those contexts. I just think when we're in either one, we wish it was a little bit more, because we understand that we are a little bit more and in order to have the conversation that we're going to have tonight, we need to make a space for the little bit more."

Scott:

And I kind of feel like what it means to be a human being is this crass and sacred together. And I'm trained as a spiritual director and I care about spiritual formation in people. But I think the way that, I guess, faith or a robust spirituality starts to decrease in your life is the baby steps of a divide itself. It's when we go, "Well, here's who I am at my church," or temple or synagogue or whatever it is, my small group, my Bible study. "And then here's who I am all the other places." And then eventually, as you keep going through your life, those become so separate that you just get rid of one of them, because it's hard to be a lie, it's hard to live a lie. I just don't think the goal of your spiritual journey is to become a better person. I think the goal is to become a whole person. Cults are built on virtues. I think a real deep wisdom in a spiritual practice is about learning that all of your self is beloved, and giving grace to all of that.

Emily:

So, I would love to explore what you just said for the rest of our time together.

Scott:

Okay, great.

Emily:

Both from a perspective of you as the artist, but also as the person who is receiving and being challenged by your work. So first, on a good day, you may feel like a leader and a pioneer as someone who, for lack of a better way to say it, straddles kind of the street, the seminary, and you're kind of in these "two worlds", I'm putting that in quotes because that's the whole point, right? Is that you're both. Maybe there's a little too much sacredness for the bar and a little bit too much bar for the church.

Scott:

Yeah.

Emily:

And you're living in these two places. And on a good day when you're in a good space, you're like, "I am a leader, I'm a pioneer, I am forging the way." But we both know not all days are good days. And so, I'm curious, what do you do with the loneliness that I know must come from being an artist who straddles in a way, but for the sake of wholeness? Tell me, what words do you have for me on that?

Scott:

I was going to say, "I'm sorry. Did you see me this morning? How did you know?" Yeah, there is... well, one of the things I... and this is interesting, post-pandemic, that the show that I do, it costs me a lot. I put a lot into it. And so it's a few days of working through some lowness. And probably today is my, right at the end of it, from the last show I did. I have very specific practices on my low days. I try not to make any decisions about who I am and how my life is going. I don't make any plans for the future. I usually eat a plate of nachos, because that's a doorway to love. I go on a walk, I swim laps, I talk to a friend. I try to get out of my head and into my body.

Scott:

Your head and your mind is a wonderful, wonderful thing. But some days it's not your friend. And your body can let you know that you're loved and let that you're not alone. So, I try to get out of that narrative. There's very few days that I feel like I'm a leader and I'm forging ahead. I think I have a unique contribution and I look forward to others doing that same kind of contribution. I think it's happening out there. I'm in kind of a weird field where I don't have a lot of competition, but it's also kind of a field that not a lot of people care about. Meaning in the communities of faith that I grew up in, it was always speakers and musicians and non-profit starters. And we never thought about the visual artists. And there's like, Makoto Fujimura maybe is the only other person who I've made him my arch enemy.

Emily:

As one does.

Scott:

Yeah. And he's delightful. And he's encouraged me over the years, but I'm just like, "You can't get all the work, man. I'm going to take some of your jobs." No, he's tremendous and I love what he's doing. It's just that, I think I've kind of been unknown for a long time. And then, because of the rise of certain social media platforms, the image really stands out the most. And so, I had almost a decade of being kind of hidden and working on this craft and to where it... which is kind of spiritual formation through image contemplation and that kind of stuff. And so that's kind of what I've done. But I think the root of that comes to, I believe that our language is rooted in imagery. When when we're speaking, we're trying to convey what we're seeing externally or internally, our thoughts and feelings.

Scott:

And then if you look at beliefs, beliefs are rooted in sacred texts, which are rooted in images. So, I actually think when we're talking about what we believe in, we're actually talking about these inner images we have, about how we think things work, the dynamics of it. So, when somebody says, "I no longer believe in God," I'd be like, "Yeah, tell me the God you don't believe in anymore." And they would describe something to me. And I'd be like, "Yeah, that's a crappy God. Don't believe. You shouldn't." And so what I'm attempting to do, or at least contribute, is going, "I think we need an updated visual vocabulary." I'm trying to image the spiritual journey. This weird pilgrimage that we're all on, because I think that the visual language that I was given, if any, I grew up in Protestantism, because there's hardly

any, it's very lacking.

Scott:

And a lot of my stuff is just my own therapy. It's just I'm trying to create the sign post so I know where to go. I'm the pilgrim making the path as I walk it. And then I leave those artifacts online, and then on peoples' walls, and that's kind of it.

I'm very wary of getting into being known as a spiritual person. I don't know. Because that comes with so much projection and I'm not allowed to be a failure. I'm not allowed to make mistakes. I'm not allowed to have bouts of doubt and despair. And I don't want to be that kind. I want to be a human. And unfortunately, it feels like a lot of times our religious practices are about not being human. And so, I guess I keep allowing that humanity to come out. And so, eventually people go, "Oh, this is who he is. Let's just let him be who he is." But I want to offer something that helps people become their whole human self. I just don't think this is an invitation to be un-human. I think it's an invitation to be deeply human.

Emily:

Your live show, and now your book, *Say Yes*, walks with us along the journey of when life doesn't turn out the way you wanted it to, or the way you thought it would. And you write this powerful line, "There are countless ways we can give up on ourselves while we are still alive."

Scott:

Yeah. There's a spectrum of giving up, a spectrum of dying. And the book, the show, is kind of tackling that spectrum, which on that spectrum is binge watching something every night, because you don't want to deal with the conversation you know need to have. It could be opening a bottle, or tapping your phone endlessly, to numb the pain that keeps calling your name day after day. Or you can go all the way to the end of the spectrum and go, "I just don't want to be here." And that's where we're talking about suicide or just giving up on ourselves. I had a close... I have my dad... I shouldn't say. I already said my dad. My dad is a delightful man, but he spent a good part of my life watching five hours of television every night, just trying to find something to do. And it's now in his later years, he's like, "Oh, I wish I would've done this. I wish I would've done that."

Scott:

It's like, "Well, he had five hours a day." And don't get me wrong, as a tired parent, I understand the end of the day where you're like, "I don't think I can do much else." I understand that. I just want to bring that wisdom of basically our future regret into my life now and adjust. So, I found myself where, yeah, middle of my life, I recognized that there was this deep thing in me. And I just felt so far from that. And I guess the question was like, can I still pursue that? And immediately was confronted by these inner arguments that were very powerful and strong. And I had to develop these practice against that, these practices to counteract the arguments. I remember working with a therapist because I went through a real depressive episode and one of the things she said was, "You need to develop some kind of physical activity, like running or something like that, because it helps your body, helps your mental state."

Scott:

And so, I started going on these runs, but I remember on one of those runs, I was just like, "Well, why the hell am I running anyway?" I eventually bumped up against the deeper existential questions of, "Well, what is life?" And it's even in the book where it's just like, "I know life is a miracle, but what happens when the miracle sucks sometimes? And if there's a giver of that miracle, does it have anything to say

about the suckiness?” And so, these questions and conversations became deeper and deeper. So, in a way, the show and the book is like, “Hey, here’s the easy practice.” It’s just a statement, but it’s layered in yourself and who you are, and what does it mean to be a human, and why are we here, and all of that kind of stuff.

Scott:

For one, I think we need to talk about suicide, because it’s so prevalent and it’s around us. And some people think that talking about it makes it glamorous. And that’s not true. Talking about it creates solidarity and it helps us know that when we find ourselves in painful situations, that we’re not alone. But also I think there’s this, what I have seen is that escapism, which is at the heart of suicide, which is like, “I want a change. This is over and I want to get into something different.” I’ve seen that same escapism in the religion that I grew up in, with this nonstop interest in the afterlife or the end of the world. And I was like, “It’s the same thing.” This kind of like, we’re not dealing with where we’re finding ourselves here, and we’re just constantly living in a made-up elsewhere and maybe the answers to the change we want is here. Maybe the divine voice is in this moment. Maybe this is the very soil that needed to get tilled so I could plant something new. And that’s kind of what I’ve found to be true.

Emily:

I think what you bring might even be deeper than you mean to bring. I just think there’s so much depth in the call or the invitation to die. And not maybe in a physical way, but even in the practice of... I mean, in Say Yes you talk about a death practice.

Scott:

Yeah.

Emily:

Which, alarm bells go off when you hear that, it’s like, “What? Who is this guy? And what is happening here?” But it’s a deeply true invitation of letting go. And you kind of bring up the question, “What are you free to do because your dream died?” And that question has the potential to really stop us in our tracks, because that’s not a question we ask ourselves. I’ll reframe.

Scott:

Yeah.

Emily:

A lot of people listening to this podcast, *The Next Right Thing*, we talk about when we are in... I mean, they sang about it in *Frozen 2*, which by the way, I started the podcast before *Frozen 2*, ff I may just say. But in the movie, it’s a very dark moment when she sings this song, *Just Do the Next Right Thing*, because it is reflective of when we are in a deep darkness, sometimes, I mean, the only thing we can do is just what is the next right thing? And I think for those of us maybe who are just living through life, maybe not in a deep darkness, but definitely not in a bright brightness, maybe just a medium light of a regular old day, but a lot of us they’re hesitant to move forward in the face of big or small decisions. And we struggle with what I call chronic hesitation.

Emily:

And I think a big reason of that is because we’re afraid of making the wrong choice, or we are afraid of, as

you so eloquently put earlier, future regret.

Emily:

You even say in *Say Yes*, “I just feel like I’ve been falling down some stairs every day into my present reality.” And I thought, “How many of us can maybe apply that to at least one, if not many situations in our lives?” that’s not so much about making a wrong choice, but maybe it’s just maybe you look back on your life and you’re like, “Oh, for 20 years, I didn’t make a choice at all. I just landed here.” And so, I feel like a lot of what your book is about, what you talk about, is that feeling of, “Oops, 20 years went by and I forgot to choose which direction I wanted to go.”

Scott:

First I want to say that my daughter was born the year before *Frozen* came out in her, her name is Elsa. So we always have been like, “This is Elsa, named before *Frozen*.” And then second, yeah, when we talk about a death practice... And granted, look, I’m an artist, I’m an Enneagram 4, if you know what that means. I wear mostly black because it’s slimming. But yeah, I’m obsessed with death in some ways. But when we say death practice, it doesn’t have to be so emotional and artsy. It really is just a way to help reframe what you think you find yourself in, the story you find yourself in. All faith traditions kind of have this death practice in them. Some of the best wisdom, mystic sayings are, “Die before you die.” Because what does that allow you to do then?

Scott:

And I have tears of death practice, which sounds weird, but just it helps me reorient to what I think is deep down in me that’s kind of leading me. So, in the book I pitch this idea of we all have this deep path of desire. And that’s corroborated by Saint Ignatius of Loyola said that actually the way that the divine speaks to us the loudest about our life and our calling and our vocation is through that desire. That takes discernment, because desire leads us. it costs you something. And it can lead to flourishing, but it can lead to destruction. So, it takes discernment. But I keep coming back to there’s this thing in you that you know you kind of want to do, or you want to pursue, so what’s holding you back from that?

Scott:

And I think in death-defying situations, like I almost drowned one time surfing. And when I got out of the water, I wasn’t like, “Whoa, I need to work on my surfing skills.” I was like, “I got to rethink everything about my life,” because it should us readjusted... That conversation with your eventual disappearance demands an adjustment.

Let’s start with an easy one. When I get a creative project in, I do a little mini death practice. I go, “If this is the last thing I did, if after three months I die,” which is entirely too much pressure to put on a creative project. But if I go, “If this is the last thing I did, would I be okay with that?” And if I go, “No,” then I have to go, “Well, why? What else would I wish I have done?”

Scott:

And then if I know what that is, then the question is, “Well, why aren’t you doing that?” Because that’s the deepest thing in you. That’s the thing you want the most. So, what happens in that moment is kind of an inner compass comes up. It keeps me in line. It’s like, this is the trajectory I want to be heading, but the moment you choose to do something, all kinds of things come, all these seemingly really good things are going to try to take you away from that. And so it helps you just kind of stay on that path where you’re like, “This is my deepest desire.” Also, as a parent, I guess one of the gifts of being a parent and having

three kids is that I can't do everything that I imagine I could do. So, I have to really prioritize about, "Well, if I could only get to do one or two things, what are the most important things to me? And can I give honor to that?"

Scott:

And so that's also helpful. But then even, I just did this, and my wife and I are in this conversation, but I grew up by the ocean, up in Washington State. I grew up in a small little beach town. And now I live in Austin, Texas, not a lot of beachfront property. But I just was like, "If I died in 10 years, would I have any regrets like about the last 10 years? Or what would I regret the most?" Or just kind of checking in. And I was like, "I deeply miss being in a relationship with the ocean." So, that is just a conversation I didn't know I needed to have, but I'm now... It doesn't mean we're packing up and moving. It just means like, "Hmm. Okay, well, does that mean you... Should I start thinking about my year and spending some ranging some travel for that? Is it just nostalgia? Does it mean..."

Scott:

It helps me get in touch with that stuff, so. These things are really helpful to just kind of tapping into what gives you life. It's really about what is bringing you alive the most? And then we all know that the responsibilities and the fears and the busyness of life can start putting out that fire that's in us. And I don't want my fire to go out. I want it to burn. And so, this death practice kind of helps me get in touch with that fire, that light that's in there already.

Emily:

Yes. I would love to get it kind of down to the ground for the listener who might be like, "Okay, so what if I'm realizing..." By the way, you talked about opportunities, like when you finally do name that desire like, "This is what I really want," which, by the way, is not an easy thing to do.

Scott:

No. No.

Emily:

Because so many of us have been told all our lives that that's not okay.

Scott:

Yeah.

Emily:

And so, kind of getting down to like, "This is what I really most deeply want," and immediately you described opportunity will come your way that will be desire adjacent.

Scott:

Yeah. Yeah. Just a little bit.

Emily:

Just little bit.

Scott:

It'll be like 98% of everything you want, but not fully.

Emily:

But not fully.

Scott:

And you'll be like, "Okay, I'll settle for that."

Emily:

And here's the thing, sometimes you don't know if you're settling for that, or if you just have too high of expectations. My sister has a great word that she made up. She called those flopportunities, that look like opportunities, but really they're not, they're just kind of flops, which sometimes you don't know until you say yes to a couple of them, and then you look back and you're like, "Oh, that was not really what I wanted it to be."

Scott:

Yeah.

Emily:

But in that process of naming your desire, do you have any... I will not use the word 'tips' because I feel like you might just shut it all down.

Scott:

I love tips. Tips are great.

Emily:

But when it comes to like, how would you advise someone who's like, "Okay, Scott, I believe you that naming my desire is something important for me to do as a human person becoming more fully myself." But what would you say to someone who says, "I don't know what I want."

Scott:

Yeah. Yeah. And I think first we have to realize we live in a massive culture of consumerism and advertising. So, our hearts and our minds are just cluttered with what we think we want. So, it may take some time. I think creating space and a bit of silence and solitude to allow all that clutter to just kind of quiet a bit. So, it might take you a week, a month. Discernment isn't necessarily instantaneous. Discernment is a period of time where you give intention to, I guess, what is hidden within you.

Scott:

And so, it's not necessarily... And this is kind of the premise of the show and the book is like, our deepest dreams aren't the car or an object. It's to be the kind of person. What we deeply desire is to be a kind of person in the world. And what we think is like, "Once I get that thing, then I'll be that person." But really it's the opposite. It's like you start working on being the person, and then maybe those things will come. Or maybe you'll just be like, "Now that I'm that person, that doesn't matter to me." That's the kind of mystery unfolding. I would say and then also in this conversation is really accepting the gift of yourself as... Part of why we've been told to not accept our desires is because we've been told we're wrong or

sinful or evil or whatever, and we can't trust ourselves.

Scott:

And it's awful living a life where you feel like you can't trust yourself. So, I actually don't adhere to that anymore. I think there's actually, your identity is beloved, but a lot of mud got put on that, so you can't quite see it. If we talk about spirituality, I think spirituality isn't about becoming something better. I think it's about removing what has gotten in the way to a core identity. That's just my standpoint, but the fruit of that standpoint is way better than, "I'm a piece of crap and I just got to keep doing better to earn love." That fruit is bitter and doesn't help anybody.

Scott:

Here's a tip that I think maybe kind of helps us get with that compass and stuff, is I imagine... so it's just this kind of metaphor of, if you're going to go on a road trip, but you knew you weren't going to be able to get to the destination, how would that affect the road trip you go on? Well, you would go on a road trip that the process was as enjoyable as the destination. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the West Coast, but California. If you're going to, like, "I'm going to go to LA to San Francisco. I am going to take I-5, which is a big interstate, dead shot, real boring, it's a lot of concrete. Or I'm going to take the 101, which is on the coast, it's winding and weaving. It takes like an hour longer." But you're like, "But if I didn't know I was going to get to San Francisco, I'd probably just drive the coast. I'd probably take the one that's beautiful and inspiring and filled with wonder and opportunities and adventures," versus nonstop rest stops and Carl's Jrs, whatever.

Scott:

So I think the same thing is like, if you could imagine going on a journey, but you didn't know if it was going to fully work out that way, what sounds like the most enjoyable journey? What would be like, "It's complicated, but I'd still get up in the morning to try that out"? That's where I think it helps us get in touch with our desires and stuff like that. I also think, too, doing a death practice. My spiritual director, at a point in my life gave me a practice, and I laid this out in the book. It's just like lay on the ground and imagine you're in your casket and you're about to die.

Scott:

And then as you're doing that, just give gratitude for everything that you've been given in your life. I like to say, just Marie Kondo your whole life. Just find that spark of joy, give it gratitude, and let it go. And as you're like, "I'm going to die. I'm going to die. Thank you for these things. I'm going to die. I'm going to die. I'm about to die," that deepest desire in you will come to the surface and you'll go, "Man, I wish I would've given that a shot. I wish I would've paid attention to that, made space for that." And what I'm submitting to us is that, that wisdom at your end of life, is there for all of us. And we can take that and apply it to, hopefully, our long lives that we still have ahead of us.

Scott:

I think happens when we don't... and this is partly our culture, which is afraid of dying, which is ignoring it. And there's lots of things about that. Babies are born and people die behind closed doors. And so we don't see the cycle of life in our modern society. But embracing your finiteness, embracing your death is what's going to help you live the best, because it's going to prioritize to you and make those changes. And so, I now use that as a way to go, "What do I want to do the most?" I started doing performing arts in my 40s, which sounds embarrassing, to me at least, it sounds embarrassing to try something new, but I was like, "If I don't try it, I'll always regret it. And so I'm going to just try to do it."

Scott:

And there have been very unglamorous moments along the way. Don't get me wrong. When only four people show up, that's not fun. But, in that moment I was like, "So, do you do what you want to do because of the audience, or you want to do it?" And I remember I performed the hell out of that show to four people, because I was like, "It's not about you. It's about me." It's about, "I want to do this craft and I love it. And why should I assume that I would have 400 one day, if I can't give it to 4?" And that was a great teaching moment. And now, I do happen to have hundreds and hundreds come, which is awesome.

Emily:

You had this pivot point of recognizing, "I've been doing my work in a certain type of way for many years," and maybe it was desire adjacent. It wasn't on the nose of what you really wanted to do, but then you were able to name what you really wanted to do. And of course, immediately you hear the voice that says, "Nothing's going to change you suck and are ugly and dying's better than living," which are things that you really dive deeply into in the show and the book, which I think we can all relate to, which I think is worth pointing out that naming the desire is step one, but we all have a similar human experience of the immediate, who do I think I am? That come in all these various forms, but it's pretty universal to everyone.

Emily:

But you made the pivot and yet, doing the show, you just said at the beginning of our conversation, you kind of have to come to... There's a little bit of a down after it.

Scott:

Yeah. Yeah.

Emily:

And you're not going to make big life decisions. You're going to eat the nachos. You got to give yourself some time to get into your body and out of your head. And that's still a part of your process, even though you are doing the work that you feel, sounds like, most deeply called to do.

Scott:

Yeah. There's a cost to it. It's probably beneficial that you don't get everything you want. And this isn't a book about get everything you want in 10 days or less. It's going like, "You want to go in a direction and you're worthy enough to go in that direction. Why do you think you're in not?" That's the deeper question.

Emily:

Yes.

Scott:

But maybe, providence, love, the almighty, the giver of your existence, will lead you on something that's unexpected. Because your priorities change. Here's the main thing is that when we imagine a dream, our dream is always a version of ourselves or our lives without any vulnerabilities. We always imagine a scenario where we don't have any weaknesses. And there's actually no way to be in the world without vulnerabilities. So, the dream needs to die in order that you could enter into the deeper desire under that dream, but with your vulnerabilities. Those three arguments that you mentioned, which were the arguments that I needed to deal with, they were invitations to accept my vulnerabilities and then,

but still go, “But that doesn’t mean that I can’t participate like nothing’s going to change,” which is the main argument that makes me most depressed. And my pivot to that is, “I’m on my way,” meaning I’m on process. This isn’t the end of my story, it’s on my process. But that vulnerability there is like, “Okay, I tend to tell myself a narrative that’s conclusive.” And I need to make sure that I’m malleable with my narratives and going, “This is maybe just part of the process I’m in and there’s a lot of unforeseen-ness.”

Scott:

And so I can remind myself and I do. Man, I’ll tell you what, I do that one every day, because constantly I’m like, I’m not there, I’m never going to get there, it’s always going to be this way. And I have young kids and I’m just like, why don’t I just throw in the towel? Because I’m never going to get away from all of this laundry and cleaning and... but I just have to go, look, my three year old, in two years, will be five. And that is just like a... it’s like coming out from underwater and taking a breath. It’ll be different. It’s always changing. I just heard an interview with the musician Jewel, who’s a delight and a gift to us all. But she has this great metaphor where she’s like... she was a homeless teen for a while and very suicidal.

Scott:

And she’s like, “I sat by the ocean and I watched the tide come in and out,” which means she was there for like 10 to 12 hours. To watch the tide come in and out is a long time. And she’s like, “What that tide taught me is that nothing ever stays the same. Even if it’s in very small ways, something’s always changing. And if I can just wait out whatever I’m in, something new will come about.” When we feel stuck somewhere, we can just go, Well, this is how it’s always going to be. And it’s not true. It may be where you’re at now, but something will always change and you can give yourself some grace to go... and then I think there’s other things that I can do in there, but going, “Things will change.” My wife and I have a mantra, which is like, “A phone call and an email can change everything.”

Scott:

I also think that when you’re in a spot that you find yourself miserable in, I think a great question you can ask yourself is like, “Well, what is this place? What is the only conversation I can have by being here?” And maybe that’s a conversation about how I’m doing things, what kind of decisions I allowed myself to get into, my habits, what am I not doing? Those kinds of things. So, yeah. I’m not making a book that’s like, “Get all your dreams to come true.” I wanted to offer an experience, and now an experience through a book that says, “There’s something happening in you. There’s something leading you forward. And I hope you say yes to it, because this is the life you’ve been given to say yes to. I want you to say yes to your life. I want you to say yes to the miracle that you’ve been asked to live, even though the miracle sucks some days.”

Emily:

Yeah. And that doesn’t mean you chose wrong. It just means you’re a human person among human people.

Scott:

Exactly. Exactly.

Emily:

So welcome. We’re glad to have you here.

Scott:

Yes. Yes.

Emily:

Well, Scott, I have one final question I ask everyone. First of all, I want to thank you for mentioning Jewel, because she is a national treasure.

Scott:

Yes.

Emily:

I've read her a memoir. She is fantastic. We'll talk about that later. But final question is, what is your next right thing?

Scott:

Oh, my next right thing. Well, oh, yes. I recently got to become friends with one of my heroes, who's this woman named Nadia Bolz-Weber. She's a writer and Lutheran pastor punk rocker. And always a dream of mine is to be connected to the Moth storytelling series. And she is. And we were talking and I was like, "I've always wanted to try out for that." And she's like, "Do you got a story?" I was like, "Yeah." And then she just texted me two days ago and was like, "All right, the creative director wants to hear your story." And so now... and it's not good. I just have snippets. So I was like, "Okay, I got to put some time and effort into that." But it's like, that fear and dread and excitement, it'll get me up in the morning.

Scott:

Talk about smoking what I'm selling, I'm just like, "No, it's not good enough," but I'm like, "You don't know that. Just get into it. See what happens. This is part of writing or creating is the surprise that can happen." And then I'm like, "I can't share that. That's so personal." And then it's like, "That's exactly what makes a good Moth story is the embarrassing personal." So I was like, "Okay, all right. I just have to tell it how it is, because other people will go, 'I know that. Yeah.' So, that's my next right thing? Next best-

Emily:

That's it. [crosstalk 00:43:35].

Scott:

It's the right thing-

Emily:

It might not be best, but it is deeply right.

Scott:

It's deeply right. It's the right thing I need to do.

Emily:

I love it. Scott, thank you so much for joining us here today. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Scott:

Oh, I've loved it. Thank you for having me.

The Next Right Thing with Emily P. Freeman

Thanks for listening to episode 209 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of finding life beyond the death of a dream 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. As always you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman, or online at emilypfreeman.com, and you can find our guest today, Scott Erickson, on Instagram @Scottthepainter or online at his website, scottericksonart.com. That's E-R-I-C-K-S-O-N. And that's where you'll also find information about his brand new book, *Say Yes: Discover the Surprising Life Beyond the Death of a Dream*, as well as information about his current tour dates for his live show. It's also called *Say Yes*.

And that's a liturgy of not giving up on yourself. It juxtaposes story-teaching, participation, humor, and image curation, as he walks participants through the very personal and universal conversation about the death of a dream and the overwhelming voice of giving up on our lives. If you're tired of pat answers of a full solar spirituality, of being unable to fully be honest about how sad you are or how difficult things have been for you lately, I'm sure you'll find a comrade in Scott Erickson's work, whose superpower is to create a visual vocabulary for the spiritual journey that we're all on. Well, in closing, I wanted to share a few words from Scott's book, *Say Yes*. He writes. "The problem with making something a product is if the product doesn't work in the way it was advertised to you, you get rid of it. This toothpaste didn't whiten my teeth. This weed killer didn't kill my weeds.

"This God let my dreams die. And we walk away. Another problem with making the divine a product is it presupposes that the giver of your existence hasn't been evolved in your life already. If God is the giver of all existence, do you think the giver is unaware of what's going on with you? Do you think you have to get the giver's attention? Or could you instead pay more attention to the work the giver is doing in your life already? What if the giver of your existence is the one who's led you to this place where the dream could die, because the dream was the thing standing in the way of a deeper conversation?"

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