



223: How to Move Through Small Disappointments

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 223. 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. Listen in.

It was four months into the pandemic, and our family beach trip had been canceled, like everything else. We go every year with John's family, but in the summer of 2020, no one's going anywhere and we aren't visiting with anyone outside of our immediate family, much less staying in a house with them. But the kids did have a couple of friends who were in our quarantine bubble, and we decided very last minute to rent a house on Hilton Head and go to the beach anyway, just us and the kids. We cooked nearly all the meals at the house, we spent most of our time either on the water or riding bikes outside.

But aside from fact that we were at the beach, this vacation is not like the others. Instead of staying on the ocean side, we stayed on the sound side. Instead of being with family, we were alone. Instead of having a pool, we had a deck overlooking trees and water way in the distance. One morning, I go out to the deck with no pool to read and think before the day starts, and our vacation neighbor is outside on the phone, on her deck, talking to her supervisor. She hasn't been in the loop, and she doesn't want to lose Anne. Lose Anne, and she'll have to hire two people to replace her. She says a lot of words, and I hear every single one of them. By now it's 8:00 AM, and I'm fully annoyed. She's been getting off the phone for a full five minutes, and never stops saying thank you.

Two years before that trip, John travels with me on a work trip to California. We tack on a few days at the end for a little vacation, just the two of us. Our final night, we head to a small hotel on the water, a room that I'm super excited about because it's so close to the edge that when you sit on the bed, your entire view is just water. But once we arrive at the hotel, it has a major Unsolved Mysteries vibe. It was tired from years of the wind, beaten down by salt and weather. What looked beautiful on the internet was oddly threatening in real life, the wind so loud you couldn't stand outside, the water a little too imminent, the horizon a little too wild. Too much wander up close can feel dangerous quick. We stayed there one night. It was too long for me.

Last summer we flew to Montana, and I was looking forward to the whole trip, but mostly I was looking forward to seeing the stars. I'd never been to that part of the country. And whenever anyone asked me, what are you looking most forward to, that's what I said. I can't wait till it gets dark and I can look up and see the stars. But as the plane descended and we landed in Montana, it was painful to admit what my heart knew immediately. As it turned out, the wildfires in the west that burned nearly eight million acres that summer, well, one million of those acres were in Montana alone. Even the blue sky looked gray. None of

us wanted to say it out loud, but there would be no star gazing on this trip.

I share these stories not to bum us all the way out or to reveal the truth about my own privilege. Must be nice, Emily, to be disappointed on your beautiful trips. I know. I totally, completely know. But isn't that what sometimes happens? Summer's coming, and we make plans. Maybe the first time we've made plans in years, whether it's plans to travel or plans to be with friends or family, or plans to host people at your house in your very own neighborhood. Whatever it is, you'll make your plans. You might spend some money. You might calculate your next right thing. And then the day comes, and you're unexpectedly angry for really dumb reasons. Or what you thought would feel relaxing actually kind of stresses you out. Or the one thing you hoped for the most, even if it was small, ends up being the one thing you can't experience or enjoy.

This is true on vacations. And it's also just true in regular life, in work, in relationships, or on simple weekends at home. We all know the importance of gratitude lists and counting our blessings and being grownups and looking on the bright side, maybe even when things don't go our way. But sometimes our next right thing turns out differently than we thought. And even if it's not life threatening or earth shattering, even if other people have it worse, even if you plan this and wanted it and it's mostly great, we might still feel some disappointment, and we might not even know all the way why.

The worst thing we can do is to scold ourselves for the feelings. It doesn't help, and it will probably make it worse. Instead, when we find ourselves bummed out and disappointed in a medium, regular kind of way, we can practice the same movements we do when it comes to making a decision. Clear some space, name those unnamed things, and then just do the next right thing in love. Clear some space could just mean take a moment to notice and acknowledge that things are not all the way well. Take a deep breath in the guest room closet. Find a moment to pause on the pool-less deck to acknowledge hello, deck in the hot sun, I wish you had a pool. You don't. And that lady next door talks way too loud.

And then name those unnamed things. And that doesn't mean to sit and analyze why you're so frustrated. It could just mean look one inch beneath the surface. I'm annoyed, or I'm sad, or this is not what I hoped it would be. And then the next question, you already know. What's the next right thing, right now in this moment? I promise you, it is not to shame yourself for feeling disappointed. It also isn't to blame someone else for things not turning out the way you hoped. Just acknowledge the thing, and then brush your teeth, drink some water, make a toast, finish the dishes, just one thing and then the next. If it's helpful to notice the gifts too, then let that work for you. The beauty of the trees, where that pool could have been, the humor in the conversation that came after everyone arrived late.

In her book, *A Rhythm of Prayer*, Sarah Bessey writes that, "Every rhythm of your life is a path to prayer." And that includes when you do your next right thing, even in the midst of medium sadness, disappointment, even in the midst of a time that's supposed to be super fun and turns out just regular fun or not even fun at all. Every rhythm of your life is a path to prayer, which means that everything we do, we bring the presence of God with us, even when we feel sad, even when things aren't living up to our expectation, even when we aren't living up to our expectation. The truth is, we live in the center of the divine dance of the Trinity, and God fathers us and mothers us in the medium light of a regular disappointing day, as we do our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 223 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of naming those small disappointments can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Yes, it's important to name them, because even though this is a podcast about making decisions, you know the deeper truth is that our daily decisions are making our lives. As always, you

can find me online at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman, where oftentimes these episodes are born in small conversations and comments and images there.

Well, in closing, I'll read a short quote from a book called *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*.

“To be well is not to live in a state of perpetual safety and calm, but to move fluidly from a state of adversity, risk, adventure, or excitement back to safety and calm, and out again. Stress is not bad for you. Being stuck is bad for you.”

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