



236: For When You Can't Figure God Out

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 236.

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.

Before we get started, I wanted to highlight a beautiful book, all about the sacred practices of everyday life. It's called *Liturgy of the Ordinary* by Tish Harrison Warren. This is one of those books we can return to again and again, where we'll be gently encouraged to find God in our ordinary moments. For example, she writes, "Whether we're children or heads of state, we sit in our pajamas for a moment, yawning with messy hair and bad breath, unproductive, groping toward the day. Soon, we'll get buttoned up into our identities, mothers, business people, students, friends, citizens, we'll spend our day conservative or liberal, rich or poor, earnest or cynical, fun-loving, or serious. But as we first emerge from sleep, we are nothing but human, unimpressive, vulnerable, newly born into the day."

As listeners of The Next Right Thing, you already know it's these ordinary moments that are making our lives. I think you'll find Tish Harrison Warren, to be a kind companion along your way. You may have seen *Liturgy of the Ordinary* with its peanut butter and jelly cover around the web over the past few years. You can buy it now from InterVarsity Press for 30% off. Visit ivpress.com and use the code Tish22 for 30% off *Liturgy of the Ordinary*. That's T-I-S-H-22 for 30% off today.

Well, hello. Hello, my friends. It's good to be back hosting regular episodes again. As you may already know, we spent some time this summer in the Psalms and an attempt to create a little space for your soul to breathe and mine, too. For four episodes in a row, I read a Psalm from the Bible, one Psalm per week. I decided to read them in different versions, that way you could hear some various interpretations of the words in case one version is overly familiar. Sometimes hearing it in a different version brings a fresh perspective your way. By the way, those episodes are there for you, if and when you want to return to them. In fact, I made a playlist on Spotify with all of the Psalm readings I've done so far, both in Psalm Summer, as well as in the past. We'll leave a direct link to that in the show notes.

Well, in my end of the week email last week, I wrapped up Psalm Summer by asking readers to let me know if you've enjoyed this Psalm Summer series on the podcast. If you've engaged with the episodes in a meaningful way and what that might look like. By the way, you can also get these weekly emails if you go to emilypfreeman.com/letter, sign up for those there. But when I sent that email out, I heard back from so many of you, some who listened alone with morning coffee or tea. Before work or on a lunch break, on walks around your neighborhood or on your work commute. Others of you listened with family during

dinner or offered them to anxious children before going to bed. I heard from caregivers, college students, grandparents, teachers, spiritual directors, parents, and healthcare workers who said the Psalm readings helped to slow them down.

The majority of people who responded enjoyed the series, there were a few who responded, who didn't enjoy it at all. Thank you for your feedback. But there's one response in particular that has stayed with me since I sent that email last week. And it's one that I actually heard from several people. They offered some version of thanks for the readings, because they said they haven't been able to read scripture lately and having someone else read it to them was a gift and a comfort they didn't really know to ask for. For those of us who might want to pray, but can't find the words and we've talked about borrowing prayers or words from others, and then letting those be our own, whether they're prayers from the saints or from scripture or from friends.

Sometimes we just need someone else to say the words for us when we can't find words on our own. Listening to the Psalms for you may have carried that same idea. You might not be in that place right now, but for those who are, it can be lonely and confusing to realize something that once felt natural or accessible to you has changed, especially when it feels like that something is foundational to your faith experience. Call it what you will but I believe in my bones, this isn't something to fear though it can feel scary when you're in it. I wish someone would've normalized this sooner for me. This feeling that sometimes it's hard to read scripture. Sometimes it's hard to pray. This week someone reminded me of the CS Lewis quote from *A Grief Observed*. He wrote, "My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered from time to time. I'm still learning that my ideas about God are not divine."

It's weird to say it that way, of course my ideas aren't divine. And yet when my ideas about God are challenged about who God is or how God is. My first response is often fear. My second response might be to reason my way through why my idea's right. But CS Lewis is right here, our ideas about God are not divine. They are not God. They are ideas, shaped, maybe yes, by scripture, but also by our own history, experience, belief and memory. And those ideas can and will change over time. Especially when our life experience, grief, loss, disappointment, betrayal, loneliness, or lack doesn't line up with life we thought we would have. But here's the thing I think some of us need to hear, including me. What if there is no rush? What if there's room for our growth and learning to take the time it takes.

If you've been struggling to find your own footing, if your ideas about God or the way you practice your faith or the way you engage in your faith community have been cracked or shattered, maybe you'll find comfort in knowing that God is divine, but your ideas about God are not. And so good news, you can hold them lightly. What if this wasn't terrifying? But what if it was a relief? What if you don't have to know everything right now? What if you don't have to know everything ever? What if your next right and most faithful thing was to decide not to figure it all out in your head, but instead to do something with your body that you love? Maybe your next right thing is to take a walk in the evening. To wear that extra bold lip. To write a poem about your childhood. Put some flowers in a vase. Soak a cloth in soapy hot water and wipe the table clean. Read that book you've been saving for later. Grab a friend and share the truffle fries.

Say hello to your neighbor. Play, breathe, build, create, support, show up and be with. And in the action in the living, see if you can find ways that God is acting and living right alongside. Pay attention to where the light comes in.

Thanks for listening to episode 236 of *The Next Right Thing*.

I hope this simple practice of refusing to rush 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 that our daily decisions are making our lives. As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman. Or online at emilypfreeman.com. Again, you can sign up for my weekly letter at emilypfreeman.com/letter. I hope to see you there. I send a letter out every Saturday that is mercifully short and relentlessly helpful of fun and wonderful things I have found on the internet that week. And then at the end of every month, I send a letter that includes three questions for you to reflect on the month before, as well as some books that I'm reading. In closing, I hope you'll hold on to these words from Margaret Silf, who reminds us that each breath is a stepping stone to God.

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