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DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR  
**How to Walk into a Room**

The Art of Knowing When to Stay and When to Walk Away



EMILY P. FREEMAN

# How to Walk into a Room

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## Introduction

1. Emily P. Freeman's grounding metaphor is "Our whole life is like a house, and every commitment, role, and relationship is like a room" (p. 3). How does this metaphor sit with you? If your life is a house, what rooms are you currently in?

2. So often we participate in discernment expecting the outcome to be certainty. But Freeman notes that "the discernment process is not necessarily about asking a question and coming out with a clear answer. Discernment is a formation process necessary to grow our faith, to teach us what it means to hear God, and to draw us into community" (p. 5). What are some experiences you've had with discernment? Have you been able to discern clear answers or felt like the process was more of a journey or formation process? Do you have an established process of discernment? If so, what is it?

## CHAPTER 1: ROOMS AND SCRIPTS

1. What does Freeman mean by the "script" that comes with every room (p. 20)? What were some of the scripts that accompanied your childhood home?

2. What are some rooms (past or present) that have given you a sense of truly belonging, of being able to be fully yourself? What made them feel so comfortable?

## CHAPTER 2: POINT AND CALL

1. When have you found yourself engaging in a point-and-call practice, like the author's mother saying "Off, off, off, off" as she checked the burners, coffeepot, and iron? Do you engage in a prayer practice, such as the Daily Examen, that is a form of pointing and calling? If so, how does this practice inform your awareness of God's presence?

2. As you worked your way through the questions in this chapter, what was the room where you felt it might be time to consider a change? What did you notice in your process of discovery about the room and your place in it? What yellow or red flags did you identify?



## CHAPTER 3: IDENTIFY THE ENDING

1. What is your internal script about leaving, quitting, or changing your mind? Where did it come from?
2. What was a significant ending (or leaving of a room) in your life? Was it planned, forced, or chosen? What is its legacy in your life?

## CHAPTER 4: REMEMBER YOUR PATH

1. Freeman writes that in making decisions we often consider only the path ahead and not the past. “Our good work, then, is not to try to find the path before us but to name the path behind us” (p. 51). When making decisions, do you tend to look back or to look forward?
2. Do you think of yourself as one of your own teachers or even one of your greatest teachers (p. 56)? Why or why not?
3. Of Gary Thomas’s nine pathways (pp. 59 to 60), which one resonated most with you? Which one felt most foreign? What does reflecting on the way you best connect with God teach you?
4. Freeman lists three values of hers: connection, creativity, and solitude. Were you able to identify any core values of your own?

## CHAPTER 5: PRACTICE CHANGING YOUR MIND

1. In the last chapter, Freeman encouraged us to look backward when we are thinking about how to move forward, and in this chapter she recommends another countercultural practice: changing your mind. Why do you think so many of us are conditioned to view changing our minds as something negative? What are some smaller ways you have changed your mind, in terms of preferences in fashion, music, and food, for example?
2. Referencing Brian McLaren’s definition of repentance as rethinking, Freeman invites us to “embrace changing our minds as an ordinary liturgy” (p. 87). What does that mean to you? What place should changing your mind have in Christian life?
3. Have you changed your mind about a larger theological issue, like Emily P. Freeman did about the LGBTQ community? If so, what did that look like for you? Was it instant or gradual? What did it feel like to come to a different place? What were the repercussions, if any?



## CHAPTER 6: ARROWS & ANSWERS

1. Freeman offers many descriptions for that space between two rooms: a hallway, a waiting room, a place of permission, a bridge, a pause, a deep breath (pp. 94 to 95). Do any of these descriptions speak to your current situation?
2. How does discernment differ from decision-making?
3. What are the rhythms and rituals in your life that help you stay engaged and connected, “to stay embodied in your life” (p. 105)?
4. Freeman names several grounding metaphors that accompanied her during this liminal time of the pandemic when she was in the process of leaving her church: a table, fire, and a sense of darkness or unknowing. What, if any, symbols or images have carried you through times of upheaval?

## CHAPTER 7: PEACE OR AVOIDANCE

1. Why is the way we leave rooms important? In your current situation, is your instinct to raise hell or to disappear? Can you see a third way?
2. When have you confused inner peace with the relief of avoidance? In what ways might avoidance lead to more anxiety?

## CHAPTER 8: READINESS OR TIMELINESS

1. When in your life have readiness and timeliness aligned when it came to a departure or a new beginning? What is one significant time when they did not? How did you manage the disconnect?
2. Freeman suggests the “for now” mantra for when you’re ready but it isn’t time, and “let go” for when it’s time but you’re not ready. What in your life is just for now? What do you need to let go of? Where can you offer thanks for readiness and timeliness being in perfect alignment?



## CHAPTER 9: ENDINGS AND CLOSURE

1. Why is it important to name our endings in plain language?
2. Have there been endings in your life you have not fully processed or grieved? Did this chapter suggest any ways that you might be able to honor or mark them?
3. In your current situation, what must you leave behind? What do you want to take with you?

## CHAPTER 10: WALK IN AS A LEADER

1. Which term best defines you: feeler, thinker, or doer? How does this knowledge affect the way you see yourself as a leader?
2. Freeman writes that to be an effective leader, you need to “lead yourself first” (p. 177), to be authentically yourself and not focused on pleasing others or avoiding crises. Are you someone who knows who you are and can lead yourself? If so, what practices help keep you connected to your authentic self? If not, what might leading from a place of knowing yourself look like for you? What interior work or helpful practices might it entail?
3. What are some characteristics of your own unique brand of leadership?
4. When have you felt that you failed to lead? Can you offer yourself compassion about that instance? Could your actions or lack thereof have been a different kind of leadership?

## CHAPTER 11: WALK IN AS A LISTENER

1. Freeman writes about how important it is to listen to our bodies and also how difficult it can be. How do you listen to your body? What is a message your body has tried to give you recently or in the past?
2. Are you a good listener? Do you struggle with the urge to always fill silences with words? What is your practice of silence, if any?



## CHAPTER 12: WALK IN AS YOUR OWN FRIEND

1. What new room beckons? What will you keep at the forefront as you enter? What would it look like to walk in as your own friend?

2. Freeman encourages us to think about who is with us and who we can ask for help, particularly during transitional times of leaving and entering rooms in our lives. Who are your companions in the journey? Who can you call upon for help?

3. Throughout the book, Freeman has urged us to PRAY: point and call, remember your path, acknowledge presence, and yield to the arrows. Which of these four steps are you working on right now? What are some of the practices from this book you will carry forward? A two-word mantra? A breath prayer? A different understanding of yourself?

**“When we leave a room, we don’t walk into nothing. Something new is always waiting.”**

– EMILY P. FREEMAN, *HOW TO WALK INTO A ROOM*