



## 117: Don't Look At The Wall

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 117. This is a podcast about making decisions but also about making a life. Many of the decisions we make are second nature. I'm here for the ones that aren't. In these short episodes, I usually either tell a story, share a meaningful quote, or offer a simple next right step. This time I'll do all three. Sometimes life advice comes from unexpected voices. Today, I'll share one such voice with you. Listen in.

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The original *Cars* movie released in 2006, which was also the year our son was born. At the time, our girls were toddlers and I had three young nephews, so we watched a lot of *Cars*, the cartoon version. This is what I'm saying, with Mater, and Doc Hudson, and Radiator Springs, and of course, Lightning McQueen, that all the kids called Lightning the Queen because, of course, they did. About a month ago, John and Luke, our son, and I rewatched that movie. I guess I haven't seen it in a decade or so because every single song took me back to when the kids were tiny, and nobody slept through the night, and it felt like I was making chicken nuggets and applesauce for every lunch and dinner, probably because I was.

My days of watching cartoon *Cars* may have passed, but I'm still happy to listen to the sage advice of one real-life race car driver named Mario Andretti, who has been famously quoted over the years as having given some excellent racing advice that also seems to apply to life.

He said, "Don't look at the wall. Your car goes where your eyes go."

I first saw this quote after about a week-long bout of wrestling with some questions and discouragement in my work. Yes, y'all. Hi. It's me, Emily, talking about my work mindset again. Seriously though, this simple racing advice really stuck with me during a week where I was questioning everything from the decor of my home office, where I was literally looking at the walls, to a more metaphorical wall-gazing as I questioned the direction of my work at the time. This was actually just a few months ago. This happens every now and then for me, sometimes on a more extreme level than normal, but I'll share this particular season of what looking at the wall has looked like for me.

Now first, when Mario Andretti said don't look at the wall, he said it in the context, obviously, of racing because your car goes where your eyes go. Of course, if we want to more broadly apply that clever statement to life, the wall could represent any number of things, options, distractions, trouble, you name it. I'm not saying we're to consider our options, to change course, to be aware of obstacles or trouble that might come up as we make our decisions about our life and our work. Hello. This is episode 117 of

an entire podcast about making decisions. And I'm constantly, I feel like, talking about perspectives, and weighing the options, and seeing all sides of things. Of course, that's important.

But I will say sometimes we can get so busy looking at the wall that we spend all our time there, and we forget where we're actually going and why we're on the road in the first place.

Like the mom who's so worried about all the things that could go wrong when her baby goes off to Kindergarten, or starts driving a car, or goes off to college that she forgets to be a person, to take a walk, to eat good food and laugh at the table, and enjoy each parenting stage as it comes.

Or like the employee who desperately wants to impress her boss or outperform her coworkers that she loses all joy in the work she was once excited to show up for every single day.

Or like the writer who becomes overwhelmed by what other writers are doing and how they're doing it that she doesn't make the time to actually write the words that make her come alive, that will serve a reader well and usher light and hope into the world around her.

Like the citizen who's so completely frustrated with the state of the world of politics that she feels powerless toward any change at all rather than seeing the small things that are hers to do and using her unique voice to make way for justice in her church, her neighborhood, and her city.

And like me. I feel like I've said this before, but I keep learning it on different levels. So I'm going to share just a little bit of my own wall-gazing story with you now and maybe by the end of it you'll consider yours.

For years, years I tell you, I have felt out of place in the stage culture that many in my industry seem to inhabit so comfortably. Listen, I don't even know if that's the right way to say that, but please forgive my lack of perseverating over the perfect word description right now. I've got a point to make. It's not that I think it's wrong to stand on stages. For real, it's so needed. It's important. It is a unique calling that I respect. I just don't think it's my unique calling, at least not fully. I'm becoming more and more convinced that speaking to giant crowds from a large stage doesn't seem like the place where my most valuable contribution is offered.

This might seem like not a big deal to you, but for me this has always been a tension that I've held. The question has been for me, what does it look like to be an author who doesn't travel and speak on stages?

This question is valid, and it's important. But if I let it, it can become my own version of looking at the wall. Because instead of looking at what my work is, I slowly begin to define it by what it isn't. And eventually, that becomes a heavy burden to bear. Your car goes where your eyes go.

So for the past several years, I've been learning what does it look like to keep my eyes on the road, and I've been living into the answer. Granted, years ago, at first, it honestly looked like saying yes to lots of travel and to speaking and never feeling fully like myself in that. After that, it felt like saying no to most of the speaking but then kind of wondering if I was doing it wrong, I'll be honest.

These days, it looks like a few different things. For example, it looks like Hope\*Writers. It still does look like that, serving writers online from the comfort of my own home, leading in the ways that I know how, stumbling through it, doing it well sometimes and being really excited, and then not doing it so well other times and learning as I go.

It also looks like saying yes when my friend Tsh Oxenreider invited me to co-lead Literary London with her. It's one of my favorite trips ever. This year we're going to take our third group this summer to that trip, which is currently full by the way. Next year, it's going to look like being a lecturer for the Master's in Spiritual Formation residency program at Friends University. By the way, if you want to hear more about that, you can listen to episode 100 where I tell the whole story. And this week, as this episode airs, I'm in Southern California, quietly co-leading 28 Hope\*Writers through a yearlong mastermind cohort that we've designed, especially specifically for them.

So I give those examples not really to tell you what I'm up to lately, but just to offer some embodied real-life versions of what this has looked like for me in my work, to quit looking at the wall and instead keep my eyes on the road already. Don't look at the wall is becoming for me a kind next right thing mantra.

And remember, Mario's advice was about racing, assuming you're traveling at a fast speed. And if there was ever a metaphor for the pace of our lives right now, maybe a racecar comes pretty close. You keep your eyes on your intended path if you want this to go well. It might be tempting to catalog all that could go wrong or all that is wrong, but it's more dangerous, actually, to look at the wall than it is to simply keep your eyes on the road. So this quote found me right on time at the end of last year, and I'm so grateful for it. Maybe it's finding you today at the right time as well.

If you're having one of those days, weeks, months, or, let's face it, decades, what would it look like for you to make like a race car driver and keep your eyes on the road?

What are the walls in your own work right now?

What about in your relationships?

Are there walls in the places where you volunteer, where you give your time or your money?

What are the walls you're facing today?

Are you able to name them?

Are you willing to turn your eyes from them and focus on the road ahead?

This is your invitation to stop looking at that wall and simply do your next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 117 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this invitation to stop looking at the wall can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, but the bigger truth is that our daily decisions

are actually making our lives. As always, you can find me at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) and on Instagram [emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman). I'm there on Twitter as well.

In closing, if you want even more help in your effort to stop looking at the wall, one way to practice that is to think about the things above. Check out my friend Jim Smith's podcast called *The Things Above* podcast. It's based on Colossians 3 which begins with this simple directive to set your hearts on things above where Christ is. Seated at the right hand of God, set your minds on things above, not on earthly things, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

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