



120: What to do When The World Shuts Down

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 120. This is a podcast about making decisions but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or 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 a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

Depending on where you live, the details of your current daily life may vary, but it's safe to say that this week, we are in a state of fog. So today's episode is for all of us as we find ourselves in the middle of some uncertain times. It's a pandemic, y'all, and none of us knows what we're doing.

Doing the next right thing has been a lifeline for me in parenting, schooling, work, relationships, and all manner of decision making over the years. But this last few weeks navigating the rapidly changing situation in our world as we fight to slow the spread of covid-19 while doing the next right thing has taken on an entirely new level of meaning for me, and I hope for you as well. As we move together forward, I want to walk along with you as you navigate your next right thing for yourself, in your families, with your friends, and as you carry so many question marks. So let's take a few minutes of a timeout and practice a simple list-making rhythm to help you do your next right thing in love. Listen in.

Over the past week, our inboxes have been filled with almost every business email we subscribe to letting us know their plans to cancel something, postpone something, or change how they operate. In this current climate, while we are either quarantined or at least social distancing, it seems we long to connect more than ever. Some are sharing tips on how to homeschool our kids. Others share ideas for planning our days or how to be productive while working from home. Others are sharing links to enjoy their services for free or at a discount for a period of time. Here's one thing I know: none of us have ever done this before, and none of us knows what we're doing. This is not a bad thing. It's a true thing, and it's important to remember to show ourselves and one another, a lot of grace and, above all, to be kind.

Something else that's true is that as a global community we don't know more than we do know. It's good to name what we don't know, but in times of uncertainty, what we don't know can often be the catalyst for anxiety and spiraling. So let's stop talking in terms of months or even in days, and let's start thinking about just the next 10 minutes

In the next 10 minutes, give or take a few, let's name what we do know. We'll do it together in three

movements. Ronald Rolheiser says, we get into trouble whenever we don't name things properly. I couldn't agree more. If you're feeling stuck, unsure or unable to move forward because you don't know what to do next, it could help to name some things that are true.

First movement: Let's name our beginnings.

It could help to make a list and ask yourself in what areas of life right now am I a beginner? What is just beginning for you?

I'll give you the first one for free, and this time in history, we are all beginners. Yes, it's true. You may have been homeschooling your kids for the last 10 years, but you have never homeschooled your kids during a pandemic.

Yes, we may have worked from home our entire career, but we've never worked from home during a pandemic.

Yes, you may be the productivity queen, but you guessed it. You've never had to be productive during a pandemic.

This is all new, and we are all beginners at navigating a global pandemic. If you can't figure out why life feels hard, even though maybe for you not a whole lot has changed. Give yourself a break, and remember there are things here at play that you've never had to process before. You're doing a new thing in a weird day. None of this is normal.

So where else in your life are you a beginner right now? Are you newly engaged, newly married, or newly separated or divorced? Are your adult children living at home now for the first time in years? Are you starting a new job or continuing an existing job but in a new way?

All beginnings, no matter what they are, hold elements of joy and heartbreak. Because when we enter a new beginning, we have generally also experienced some kind of ending that has layered emotions and grief and transition and letting go all wrapped up into it. We'll get to the endings in a minute, but for now, don't be afraid to be a beginner. Be relentlessly kind to yourself. This is your next right thing.

Second movement: Where are you in the middle?

Maybe you'll want to write on your ongoing list. I am in the middle of. Are you in the restaurant or entertainment business and feel like you're in a holding pattern of uncertainty? You know this won't last forever, but how long will it last actually? You're in the middle.

Are you a teacher getting into an online teaching groove? Yes, you're a beginner here, but also this is your new middle. You'll keep learning. You'll figure some things out, and you're going to figure other things out. And it won't always be this way, but it is this way. Now you're in the middle.

Are you engaged and you are in a holding pattern because your wedding has been postponed? This is not gonna last forever, but this is a heartbreaking middle for you.

Are you working on a project that's been going on for a while? Is there a home renovation that started but

remains unfinished? Are you planting a garden, writing a story, maintaining a home, navigating a health issue, caring for an aging parent or a child with special needs? You are in the middle.

Name the middles that are true in your life right now. Be specific. These are your plot points in the larger narrative of life, but they are not your whole life. They count, but they do not get to hijack the narrative.

Third movement: What is ending?

If you're writing these down, your list may start with I am saying goodbye to. This one right now. I'll be honest, I feel the most tender-hearted about because marking the endings of things is embedded into our culture. We have parties, finales, celebrations, and farewells as part of our regular rhythm of life. Even our birthdays technically celebrated ending on a baby turns one. We mark the end of her first year, not the beginning of it. Many of our endings are communal, involving families, groups, or gatherings, but at this particular time in history we aren't able to gather. And that means some of our endings are just quietly tapering off and visible and uncelebrated.

It's important we name and acknowledge these endings, grieve them when appropriate and celebrate them too. Is your high school senior approaching the end of her senior year and you fear that maybe she's not going to actually go back to class or have a prom or get a graduation ceremony?

Is your college senior ending her semester unceremoniously? Maybe living back at home with no prospect of a job and no senior trip with friends?

Have you been let go from your job because the economy can't sustain your industry at the level it was just a few months ago?

Are you letting go of a relationship or a vocational dream?

Is your family preparing to move away from friends and family, but no one's going to be able to gather around to see you off?

Take some time to name these endings. Don't let them slip by unseen. Write it down. Tell someone you trust and most of all confess your disappointment in the presence of your friend Jesus who knows what it is to be uncelebrated, unseen and unacknowledged.

It's not supposed to be this way. Your wedding was not supposed to be postponed because of a pandemic. Your job, graduation, athletic season, family, vacation, childcare or school was not supposed to be called off because of a pandemic. This is not normal, but you are not alone.

In this time of uncertainty, it's okay to grieve the endings even though others may have it a lot worse. This is a time to name the places where we are beginning, middling and ending, and then to allow others the space to do the same.

As I said before, this is not the time to look too far into the future or try to predict outcomes. This is not a time to think in terms of months or weeks or even days. This is a time to name what remains unnamed within us and then to ask ourselves, what is our next right thing in the next 10 minutes?

Though we are keeping our distance together in spirit, in the presence of God, we can welcome, persevere and let go. We can remember that we are all beginners and trust God to teach us what we don't yet know.

We can remember that we are in submittals and trust God to keep us as we persevere by faith. We can remember that things are ending and not the way we'd hoped and trust God to carry us into an unknown future. None of this is normal, but we are not alone. Let's keep doing just the next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 120 of *The Next Right Thing*. Well, I hope this invitation to name your beginnings, middles and endings 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. The bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

If the principles you hear on this podcast are helpful for you, remember you can read the ebook version of *The Next Right Thing* for free with an Amazon Prime account. You can visit the link in the show notes for information about that, or if you just like that feeling of holding a book in your hands, it's always discounted at various online retailers so you can order the book online wherever books are sold.

As always, you can find me at www.emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram at [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman) where I'm working hard these days to be super intentional about sharing this next right thing posture.

In closing, here is a lovely reminder from Psalm 31:14-16 "But as for me, I trust in you, Oh Lord. I say, you are my God. My times are in your hand. Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me, make your face to shine upon your servant. Save me in your loving kindness."

This is the word of the Lord. It is absolutely true and given to us in love. Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.