



Episode 70: The Best Time To Make A Decision

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 70.

This is a podcast all about making decisions whether you're chronically hesitant and tend to be a decision-avoider OR if you're someone who makes a lot of decisions on the daily and, while you may be confident in making them, the sheer volume of decisions you have to make, well, it's worn you out.

This is also a place for you if just need a little white space or a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment.

For a few minutes each week, you've come to the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

I often hear from people who say they listen to my podcast even though they "don't have trouble making decisions". Well, I love that on the one hand, but on the other hand, I want to gently challenge it. Because being a good decision maker is not necessarily a character trait that is immovable. Instead, as we'll explore today, it has a lot to do with timing.

Listen in.

In August of 2011, The New York Times Magazine published an article with a question as the title. The question was "Do You Suffer From Decision Fatigue?" The article starts out with a report about three men who had done time in an Israeli prison, all three seeking parole. Of those 3, only one was granted it. The details of their cases were essentially equal, except for one: the time of day that they appeared before the board.

The one granted parole appeared in the morning and the other two in the afternoon. While this one case was not statistically significant, the article goes on to explain how this pattern of decision making in these parole hearings continued in a study of over 1100 decisions over the course of a year.

Here's a quote from the article: "Prisoners who appeared early in the morning received parole about 70 percent of the time, while those who appeared late in the day were paroled less than 10 percent of the time." They found that a favorable ruling was more likely at the beginning of the work day or after a food break than it was later in the day.

The article concluded that this was not a result of malice or even bias instead, the judges' behavior was what the article called "an occupational hazard of being the decider."

No matter how good a decision-maker you are, no matter how efficient or professional, no matter how much training and preparation too many decisions in a row take their toll. Decisions wear us down.

This is true across the board - whether you're the President of the United States or the mother of busy toddlers - there is a limit to how long we can manage, direct, choose, and decide in a given day.

The fact is we have a finite amount of mental energy to spend and making decisions is one way we pay. The problem is, unlike being winded when we run or hungry when we need to eat, there isn't an obvious physical sign that we can all point to that tell us our decider is fatigued and it's time to take a break.

Why is deciding so hard for us, especially when we're worn down? The article concludes that "part of the resistance against making decisions comes with our fear of giving up options." Here is something I've never heard before, he points out the word "decide" originates from a Latin word that means "to kill" or "to cut down."

When we're exhausted in decision-making, the last thing we feel confident doing is to make a risky choice that could potentially cut us off from better options down the road. We are afraid of making what seem to be irreversible choices.

Now, this could somewhat explain the connection I see in my own life between the renewed creativity I experience after I eat lunch and take a walk around the block. Creativity often requires risk even small risks. But I'm much less likely to take that risk if I feel hungry or tired.

Another interesting thing about our ability to make decisions is in how much it fluctuates. All of us are prone to decision fatigue - it's a physiological reality. While it's true that some of us are more naturally prone to being more decisive or making wise decisions, the truth is even the best among us are vulnerable to fatigue depending on so many factors - our health, interactions we've had with people that day, whether or not we're cold, hungry, or annoyed. Being a good decider is not a character trait as much as it is a result of whatever mental, emotional, and physical state we're in any given moment.

If you ask yourself, "Am I a person who makes good decisions?" the answer inevitably has to be, "It depends."

If only we had some kind of alarm system to tell us when decision fatigue has set in and we're in danger of not making our best choices.

While we may not have a bell to alert us when we have reached our own decision-making capacity, we can be people who develop some simple habits or practices that preserve our energy for decisions that matter.

If you are someone who doesn't struggle so much with making decisions, the chances are high that you are also someone who has developed some pretty good habits. Maybe you haven't made that connection yet, but if you pay attention and look around, I bet it's there. And that's hope for the rest of us because that means that becoming a more confident decision maker doesn't mean you have to change your personality maybe you can simply begin to establish some new habits. By way of getting you started, I'll give you five.

1. Schedule margin.

We schedule lunches, appointments, and everything else. If you want to make better decisions, maybe it's time to take margin seriously.

A full calendar will naturally lead to more conversation, more tasks, more commuting and, you guessed it, more decisions. Grab your calendar right now, today, and pick 30 minutes or an hour this week. Mark it TAKEN and keep the date. Better yet, find 15 minutes every single day for this the timeframe doesn't matter as much as the consistency. Give your brain a break before it needs one by scheduling in an appointment with no one for no reason.

2. Don't forget to eat.

If it's late in the day and a decision just can't wait, do yourself and your brain a favor and eat something before making the final call. Y'all, it's just good sense.

3. Phone a friend.

This may not always be possible, but when your decision-making capacity is low, it helps to lean on the decision-making capacity of others. See episode 33: Gather Co-Listeners for some good tips on how to gather people in your life who you can lean on to help you make the tough decisions a little bit easier.

4. Decide not to decide.

In high school I would often be invited to sleepovers, parties, or other kinds of can't miss kid gatherings and generally those requests came in fast and furious. I can't count the number of times, I would be like, *Dad can I go to Heather's tonight? I have to know* right now. I learned quickly never to phrase my question that way because while the answer may have been a yes or a maybe from my parents, Dad would always say the same thing: "Well if you have to know right now, then the answer is no." UGH the worst. I knew then that my best shot at a yes was to give them more time to consider.

Same might go for you. Deciding not to decide yet is a viable option, especially if the deadline is flexible and it's late in the day and you've already spent all of your decision making capital.

5. Do the next right thing.

Emphasis on the word *next*. The next thing is always available to us and it's never too late to choose it. Stand up and stretch. Sit down and pray. All of these steps margin, eating, conversation, and waiting

can be done with a posture of prayer. Bring Jesus with you into the next moment then the next moment after that.

His name means *with* and he always is.

If you're overwhelmed and don't know what to do, or if you're just plain tired and are weary of choosing, maybe that means it's time to close the day in whatever way you can. Even if it's 3 pm and you can't quit yet, write down decisions you can save for tomorrow. Take a brisk walk to the bathroom. Open up the window and take a deep breath.

We are not hard robots programmed to perform. We are soft humans in need of rest, laughter, connection, and space.

Take your time. Take care. Listen well. Pray always. Have faith. Sleep on it. And when you wake again, simply do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 70 of The Next Right Thing.

For the next several weeks I want to talk more about time and timing, about developing life rhythms that will help support soulful decision making in our lives.

If you enjoy the podcast, I know you'll want to get a copy of my newest book, The Next Right Thing. It will be available in US stores on April 2nd but you can give your future self a gift and pre-order it today. You will thank yourself on release day when it shows up in your mailbox and I will thank you too for being an early supporter of this book and the message. Nothing helps an author more than pre-sales and every order counts.

A special thank you to Louise in British Columbia who says "The next right thing podcast is part of our families fabric. Our children all listen to it. We enjoy having you as part of our family.

Looking forward to the next right thing book which I will be preorder for many friends and family."

Well, thanks, Louse, nothing makes me happier than to hear not only are you listening, but you're sharing with a spouse, or with the kids. In fact, I've heard from a lot of you that your six year olds, and ten year olds enjoy listening to The Next Right Thing Podcast. A special shoutout to my youngest listeners. Thanks for being the coolest ever and being a great supporter of The Next Right Thing.

As always you can find me at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman). Transcripts of this episode and all the other episodes are available at thenextrightthingpodcast.com

We'll close today with the first two verses of Psalm 91, a reminder that no amount of fatigue or confusion will ever be able to separate you from the strength and provision of the Lord, because "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!"

This is the word of the Lord. It is absolutely true, and it is given to us in love.

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