



115: Before You Decide, HALT

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 115. 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. 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 a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

If you're listening to this episode and you're well-rested, well-fed, clear-headed, at peace, happy, even-tempered, and feeling, basically, great about life, this episode might not be for you today. You are, of course, still welcome to listen, but a lot of what I have to say may just sound too obvious or overly simplistic or like basic common sense.

In many ways, this episode is obvious and also simple, but in my experience, when I have a decision to make, especially if the decision feels complicated or layered with high stakes and responsibility attached to it, sometimes common sense is the first thing out the window. I'm going to put on my mom hat now and remind us all of the worst times to make big decisions and what to do instead. Listen in.

You may already know the acronym HALT, H-A-L-T. If not, we'll unpack that a bit today. People in recovery communities may be familiar with HALT, so you're already steps ahead of us. Basically, the HALT method is to decision making and impulse control as "stop, drop, and roll" is to fire safety. Actually, I quickly Google searched "stop, drop and roll" because I haven't heard that phrase in a long time, and it's actually outdated fire safety advice. Because really, if you think about it, if there's a fire, the last thing we want you to start doing is rolling around. You actually need to hightail it out of there. But anyway, HALT is a tool often used by those in recovery as a way to pay attention to when we're in a vulnerable state. It's like a warning system for when we might need to reach out for help or take a simple action.

So, the H in HALT stands for hungry. Maybe you think you're hungry for attention or importance or productivity or a new job, but really, you just need a taco. Or maybe you do actually need some attention or support, and that's where having a good support system in decision making comes in. Which is not to be downplayed, but hunger leads to confused decision-making. Don't make decisions on an empty stomach. Instead, your next right thing is to eat something.

Number two, the A stands for anger. Listen, anger can be a phenomenal teacher. Dallas Willard says that

what's bothering us could be the most revolutionary question we all could ask ourselves. And I would add to that, what makes us angry is also potentially a revolutionary question and a really important question to be able to answer. But anger is a secondary emotion. So, when we're angry, we maybe haven't actually gotten down to the root of things quite yet.

And the worst time to make a decision is when the real issue is masked by a more prominent emotion, that may actually be secondary, or even unimportant to the decision at all. We have to get to the root of the anger and learn to properly express it. And if we don't, our anger could lead to impulsive decision making and possibly an apology tour.

If you have a big decision to make and you're angry, your next right thing is not to write the email or make the phone call or sign the contract or have the confrontation. Your next right thing is some deep breathing and maybe a walk around the block.

Next is L, and L stands for lonely. If you're feeling lonely, first listen to episode 114, where I talk for 16 straight minutes about my own loneliness lately. But if you can avoid making big decisions in the midst of intense loneliness, do. Loneliness can drive us to act before we're ready, simply because we want to do anything to escape that feeling.

But sometimes loneliness isn't something we can action step our way out of, and so it can lead to desperate decision-making. If you have a big decision to make, and you're feeling lonely, your next right thing could be to welcome the loneliness just for a bit, before you move ahead into action. And episode 114 could help with that.

Well, finally, the T. The T stands for tired. If you have a decision hanging over your head and you can feel yourself becoming irritable, anxious, weary, and weighed down, maybe your next right thing has absolutely nothing to do with that decision and everything to do with getting some rest. Take a breath, close the notebooks and the computers, close the phone, and go to bed. This decision cannot wait forever, but can it wait until the morning? Exhaustion leads to lazy decision-making.

If you're feeling tired and you have a decision to make, your next right thing could be to get some rest and wait until the morning. And then when morning comes, have hope. Weigh your options and listen to your life and do your next right thing. Make a choice. Episode 109 could help you with that.

So, HALT. H-A-L-T. It's a simple but helpful way to remind ourselves of the importance of caring for and attending to our basic human needs. If you have a decision that's giving you trouble, or if your hands are itching to take action but you feel unsure about what to do next, ask yourself these four main questions.

What am I hungry for? Is it food, love, respect, or belonging?

Number two, what am I angry about? What emotion lurks beneath the anger? Is it fear, shame, injustice?

Number three, am I feeling lonely? When I think of the people in my corner, whose faces come to mind? Is there a true friend I can call? A family member who has my back? A place where I feel safe?

Number four, am I tired? Do I need a change of scenery, a long nap, a true break, a good night's sleep?

If you have a decision to make, or even if you simply find yourself feeling heavy with the burden of decision fatigue, and that constant overthinking, maybe you need to halt and give yourself your best shot at making decisions that sing well with your core values, your inner life, and what matters most to you in the world.

As you pay attention to the needs of your body, may your friend Jesus attend to the needs of your soul as you continue to do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 115 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this invitation to HALT 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.

As always, you can find me online at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram @emilypfreeman. If you come back next week, I'm going to continue to share some more tips on listening to your life and decision making. And listen, I'm going to share with you my very own acronym that I made up. I'm not going to tell you what it is yet, but just know it's a few more reasons to pause before making a decision. I know you're not going to want to miss that.

Well, for now, a lot of what we talked about can be summed up in one simple tweet I saw back in December by a username Jean Yang. It was December 6th, and I know it resonated with a lot of people, because at the time of this recording, it has 18,500 retweets and 64,000 likes.

Here's what it says, "Two important lessons I learned in my twenties, if you think everyone hates you, you probably need to sleep. If you think you hate everyone, you probably need to eat."

Well, it's simple, but it's true. Thanks for listening and I'll see you next time.