



Episode 32: Stop Collecting Gurus

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 32.

I'm all about creating space for your soul to breathe so that you can discern your next right thing in love.

I work hard to make sure these episodes are relentlessly helpful and mercifully short.

Because if you are desperate to discern your next right step, the last thing you need is a rambling podcast host.

If you're struggling to find your footing in the midst of a busy schedule, a life transition, or a general sense of decision fatigue, you're in the right place.

Today, I'll share a simple perspective shift I've had that has helped keep anxiety at bay in the midst of uncertainty. Listen in.

At the beginning of 2017, I distinctly remember a moment of realization I had about a particular source of anxiety and decision fatigue in my life.

While a lot of my life felt fairly settled, at that time I was a bit unclear on my next steps in my work. I didn't have a lot of answers so I decided to do one thing I had some control over, to finally tackle my email inbox.

It didn't take long before I found an unexpected source of stress hiding out in there.

I wonder if you have it, too.

It is my firm belief that the contents of our email inbox always tell a story.

Well, here's mine.

I had emails from an Instagram teacher, a business coach, a book launch guy, a course creation lady, and a declutter-my-house guide.

I had results and follow-up results from tests and quizzes that I took throughout the year about my personality type, my hair type, my marketing type, and my dressing type. I am not exaggerating.

Now listen.

I love the online space if for no other reason than we can learn anything we want whenever we want to learn it.

I am a HUGE fan of online courses and online teaching.

The online courses I've taken have helped me re-shape my own business and ministry, and the ones I've taught have brought in valuable revenue for my family not to mention the deep sense of satisfaction and personal fulfillment I get from creating the kind of work that I feel called to create and interacting with people who can benefit from it. It's just fantastic and it's been a gift.

I've also learned a lot about myself from personality assessments.

I now buy different kinds of clothes that actually fit my body better because of a course I took to help me learn about that.

I have learned priceless information about book launching, marketing, and de-cluttering and a thousand other things.

That's my first point here. The material these teachers brought into my life was and is valuable and worth it.

But here's my second point. It was clear at that time I was trying to listen to way too many of those voices at the same time.

When I sat down to clean out my inbox that afternoon, I realized that over the course of 2016, **I had started to collect gurus.**

All of these experts arrived in my life (or I sought them out) at a time when I thought I could use what they had to offer.

But as I combed through my inbox, past all of the advice and instruction, results and evaluation tools, I noticed my breathing became more shallow and my head started to ache.

The problem wasn't the courses, or the email series, or the updates.

The problem was I had too many going at once.

My work what I feel called to and get paid for is to help you create space for your soul to breathe.

But making a living is nothing if I'm not also making a life.

One way I've discovered helps me live my life more fully is to take inventory when anxiety shows up. Rather than avoid it as I'm most prone to do, I choose instead to stop, to notice, and in this case, pay attention to the story my inbox was telling me.

It was obvious I had way too many gurus talking to me.

It was not as obvious as to why.

So I took some time to ask myself that question and my answer came simply and without hesitation.

As I mentioned before, at that particular time in my life, I was looking for some clarity in specific areas and I hoped one of these trainings would help me find it.

I wanted help to clarify what continued to feel like a foggy vision for the future.

That's when I noticed the pattern. When I'm feeling insecure or aimless, it's easy for me to latch on to the security and confidence of someone else, hoping that some of their clarity will rub off on me.

As it turns out, the best time to look for a guru is not when you need vision, it's when you need a plan.

It's great to find teachers and mentors. You just have to do it in the right order.

When I start looking for help before I've established a clear vision it leads to anxiety, overwhelm, and emotional whiplash.

If I don't have a vision, or if you don't like that word you can substitute it with a purpose or an intention or a direction. When I don't have those things then how do I know which steps are right for me to take?

In short, we need to choose gurus or teachers or mentors who will offer plans that line up with the vision we already have for our life, our work, and our ministry.

If you don't know where you're going, specific directions won't really help, not until you see the big picture.

If you feel frustrated and pulled in many directions like I have felt, it could be because you've been looking for advice about the journey before you, even before you know or understand your destination.

Maybe you've been frantically searching outside of yourself for help with a plan when really you need to quiet down inside yourself and listen for a vision.

I can't tell you the freedom this has brought me.

Vision has to come from the quiet place within us first.

Only then can we seek insight for the next right step to take that will align with our vision.

Now that's not to say that we are going to see a clear plan laid out before us for our life before we can know our next right step. That's the whole purpose of just doing the next thing. But too often, I take it to the other extreme and I look for outside voices to tell me what can only come from within.

That very weekend, after the inbox discovery, I took my own advice. I got quiet. I took a walk. I stopped trying to wrestle clarity to the ground.

I accepted the invitation to keep company with Jesus, not for the sake of a plan but for the pleasure of His presence.

The natural result of being with Him is I remember who I am.

I remember how my Father is very fond of me and no matter what next step I take, He will be with me.

I'm grateful for the vision we continue to uncover together and I feel more prepared to find the gurus, mentors, and teachers I'll need to help me craft a plan that makes sense.

To remain true to my promise to keep this mercifully short and relentlessly helpful, here is your small assignment:

Make an appointment with your email inbox or if it makes more sense, with your desk where you work, your bookshelf, and your social accounts.

What is the story they're telling you?

Are there areas of your life where you are collecting gurus?

It could be like me in your inbox with emails from online teachers or experts or some other type of professional person tell you what to do next.

Maybe it's in real life local courses, trainings, workshops, or studies you've signed up for.

Take a look at your bookshelves and side tables. What are the books you are highlighting and taking notes from? Are there any half-read devotionals bookmarked and set aside? Are there any lists that you

have written down, advice from other people from podcasts, or other interviews that you have been listening to?

Your job is to pay attention without judgment. Resist the urge to draw a conclusion at first. Just let yourself notice it and be curious about the story these things are telling you.

These gurus, teachers, and mentors may have wonderful things to teach you.

The assignment is not to get rid of them. Not yet. Instead, the assignment is to discern within yourself if now is the time for them.

Why are you turning to these voices?

Is it because you have a vision but you lack a plan and these teachers can help you carry it out?

Or is it because you don't have either and you're grasping for some clarity from everywhere at once?

Perhaps today is a good time to take inventory of the voices you need to hang on to and the ones you need to set aside, at least for a time.

For now, take a few moments to listen to the gentle heartbeat of your own life.

What is ahead for you?

What can you reasonably work on in the next three months?

What help do you need for the journey?

Here's a simple prayer for along the way.

O God, as we grasp for answers, be our One sure thing.

We trust you as our Teacher.

Reveal to us the story our inboxes, mailboxes, bookshelves, and journals are trying to tell us.

In your presence, we are safe to see and tell the truth.

Show us where we are frantically grasping for guidance and replace the darkened pathway with your light, the foggy future with your peace, and our longing for security with your confidence.

Bring to us the mentors and teachers we need for the journey.

May we have the wisdom to trust our own inner voice as we are united with You in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 32 of The Next Right Thing.

If you need some extra help learning to listen to the voice within, check out Episode 27: Stop Rushing Clarity. It could provide some help as you consider your next right step.

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman and you can also find me over at emilypfreeman.com.

We provide a transcript for each episode, so if you know someone who either can't hear or prefers reading to listening, you can download those transcripts at thenextrightthingpodcast.com. Just click on Episode 32 for this one.

In closing, here is some encouragement from Henri Nouwen who says this in his book, *The Inner Voice of Love*:

“The love of Jesus will give you an ever-clearer vision of your call . . . The more you are called to speak for God's love, the more you will need to deepen the knowledge of that love in your own heart. The farther the outward journey takes you, the deeper the inward journey must be.”

