



140: Do The Opposite

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 140.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. 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.

Before we get started a quick word about one of this episode, sponsors, Skillshare. Many important conversations are happening around the world right now, and your voice matters more than ever. One way to ease the burnout and overwhelm that comes with that is to explore your creativity. With Skillshare members, get unlimited access to thousands of inspiring classes with hands-on projects from a community of millions. One class I'm loving is Drawing as Self-Discovery: 5 Ways to Start led by illustrator and writer, Mari Andrew. She turns emotion into empowerment through art and talks about putting happiness on the calendar by making an illustration every day.

Then there's poet, Alison Molly. She teaches a class about beginning writing poetry and creating personal vignettes to share on Instagram. The process of blending words with visual art is always inspiring to me. And you may find it creatively challenging as well. Maybe your next right thing is taking a creative break with Skillshare. Explore your creativity while learning something new and get two free months of premium membership [skillshare.com/nextrightthing](https://www.skillshare.com/nextrightthing). That's two free months of unlimited access to thousands of classes at [skillshare.com/nextrightthing](https://www.skillshare.com/nextrightthing).

Now onto today's episode where we'll take a closer look at areas where you might feel stuck today, and hopefully, begin to look at your decisions from a different perspective. Listen in.

There's an episode of Seinfeld where George Costanza says, "Every decision I've ever made in my entire life has been wrong. My life is the complete opposite of everything I want it to be. Every instinct I have in every aspect of life, be it something to wear something to eat, it's all been wrong."

So then George decides to do the opposite of his instincts and he ends up having the best day of his life. So Vulture, which is the culture and entertainment site from New York Magazine, listed the opposite from season five of the sitcom as the number three best Seinfeld episode of all 169 episodes. It strikes all the right notes and continues to be funny, even though it aired over 25 years ago, side note, everyone, I knew

that episode came out in 1994, but I couldn't do the math in my head. So I literally took out my phone calculator and subtracted 2020 minus 1994, to see how many years it's been since that episode aired.

And that is just one of the many ways in which my brain feels foggy and stuck these days. Simple math, no longer feels so simple. I've been paying attention to our collective rhetoric around decision making over the last month or so. I've been listening to podcasts, watching Instagram stories and captions, and reading Facebook updates from friends. And in my observations, I'm noticing a few common threads that I'm sure you've noticed, too, and that's that decision fatigue is at an all-time high and it's not only impacting those of us who are historically indecisive or chronically hesitant. No, this decision fatigue has hit even those of you who are normally quick responders, fast to know what your next right thing is. I've heard from listeners this past week, who've asked themselves, "What's actually wrong with me? I feel so stuck. And I don't like this feeling. I'm usually so good at making decisions, but these days I'm either unable to make decisions or I'm making bad ones."

So the question some of us are asking is how can I get into a healthy place to where I can make decisions again? And the panic sets in because life doesn't stop for us to think, and we worry that we're running out of time to figure things out. My intention always, every single episode of this podcast, is to help you create some space to name what may be unnamed within you, and then to help you do, or at least discern your next right thing in love. This is not a one-time action. This is an ongoing practice. And often requires that we circle back around to the way we've always done things and consider if it's time to make a change.

If your typical way of making decisions is no longer bearing fruit, if you're used to powering through and moving fast, and if you're accustomed to being the decisive one in the room, well then like George Costanza at his wit's end, maybe it's time to consider doing the opposite too.

What might that look like? First, it might look like embracing an opposite expectation. I understand that feeling of looking at the way you're making decisions these days and not recognizing yourself anymore. Who is this person who used to be so put together? What is happening to me? To be fair, a lot is happening to you. And one of those many things might be that you're changing. You're growing, you're stretching, growing doesn't look linear. Like roots in the ground or weeds in your garden, growth takes turns. We don't know how to plan for, but it may also yield blooms we didn't know to expect. One thing is certain, when a plant grows, it goes through necessary change, but it never goes back to a seed. It becomes something new. Maybe there's no normal to get back to. Maybe there's only you doing the next right thing you know to do and releasing yourself from the waiting room.

No more waiting for normal. Let's just do our next right thing in love.

A second way that you might want to begin to do the opposite is to consider a different definition of a good decision. How have you always measured the decisions that you're making? Is it based on how you feel while you're making them, how other people respond to them? Is it based on if it's made in freedom with peace and in love? Do you call something good if it yields productive results and bad, if it actually flops? What is success and what is failure and who actually gets to say? Those are important questions to consider, and they'll take longer than a short episode like this one to unpack, but I will simply say that the metrics by which you measure a good decision, especially during a pandemic, well, that metric may need to be recalibrated. What's even more important than the decisions you make is the person you're becoming while you make them.

Third, and finally, take an opposite posture. If you feel stuck because you're indecisive and struggling to make decisions these days, chances are your posture toward yourself might not be a kind one. Chances are the less confident you feel about your decisions these days, the more you're tensing up, clenching your jaw, losing sleep, and scolding yourself for being too much of something bad and not enough of something good. So let's do the opposite.

If you find yourself feeling stuck, instead of holding your breath, why don't you try letting it out instead of scolding yourself? Why don't you speak words of comfort out loud? I don't know what kindness will look like for you today, but I can share one final story of what it's looked like for me.

One small way I've done the opposite this very week, I've been in a healthy habit for the last 10 days or so of doing a 30-minute morning home exercise routine, which I'm quite proud of, but right at the close of it, one day this week, I was hit with an overwhelming sense of regret, not about the exercise, but randomly about my parenting.

It came on fast and tears spring to my eyes, like a summer storm on a sunny day. And suddenly, I was surrounded by a cloud I wasn't ready for in that moment. I decided to do the opposite. You may remember I've shared here before I process the world through my feelings. And that regret arrived at the threshold of my mind as a feeling first, not necessarily as a thought. And my typical response would have been to pay only half attention to continue to finish my morning workout and then absentmindedly let the door stay cracked behind me as I moved on to other things in my day. But instead I made a decision to pause there in the doorway to nod in acknowledgment, to look that regret in the face and gently close the door. Regret, you're not useful to me here. If you need to say your peace, go find my friend, Jesus, he will take care of you.

And so if you're feeling stuck and decisive and unable to make decisions big, small or in between, take a moment, breathe in and breathe out. Know for sure you're not alone. Consider doing the opposite of your first instinct and then do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 140 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of doing the opposite can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow because while 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 at emilypfreeman.com and on Instagram at [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman). As you navigate your own next right thing, a companion that might help you along the way is another episode sponsor. It's a truly beautiful prayer journal called *The Between Places: 100 Days to Trusting God When You Don't Know What's Next*. It's by Stephanie May Wilson, who is the author of *The Lipstick Gospel* and *Every Single Moment*. She's also the host of the *Girls' Night Podcast*. Through guided prayer prompts, *The Between Places* journal will help you explore some of the most uncertain and most important parts of your life alongside God while learning to trust his guidance.

I got my copy of this journal in the mail, and I have to tell you, it is one of the most beautiful books on my

shelf. I can't get over the cover, the perfect shade of green and the pages of lines that leave room for you to write responses to the prompts. This would be a perfect journal if you're in the midst of a transition or a great gift for a niece or a daughter as she heads off to college. You can get your hands on this beautiful new journal by going to smaywilsonshop.com/ and using the promo code NEXTRIGHTTHING for 15% off that's smaywilsonshop.com and use the promo code NEXTRIGHTTHING for 15% off your order.

As you consider doing the opposite today, here's a reminder from one of my favorites, Barbara Brown Taylor in her book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*.

It's a reminder that the opposite of the day may bring gifts we never knew to look for. She writes,

“During the day, it is hard to remember that all the stars in the sky are out there all the time. Even when I am too blinded by the sun to see them while I'm driving to the post office to pick up my mail, a shooting star could be flying right over the hood of my car. While I'm walking to the library to return an overdue book, Orion's belt could be twinkling right above me. It is always night somewhere giving people the darkness they need to see, feel, and think things that hide out during the day.”

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