



150: A Guide for Personal Reflection

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 150. 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 while you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

Today's episode is all about one of my favorite decision-making practices, the discipline of reflection. And I have an incredibly exciting secret. I've been keeping from you that I finally get to share today, but first a word from this episode, sponsor, KiwiCo. We talk a lot about making decisions here on The Next Right Thing, but sometimes the decisions that feel like they should be the easiest can trip us up the most. Maybe decisions like what to swap out in place of trick or treating this year, or what you can send to a niece, nephew, or grandchild to brighten their day have you stuck. If that's the case, KiwiCo can help!

The materials included to make the terrazzo clay organizers inspired so much whimsy in me and brought back memories of my childhood, not to mention how working the clay provided a much needed break from our normal routine. If you'd like to try out KiwiCo you can get 30% off your first month plus free shipping on any crate line, just for listening to The Next Right Thing. Just head to KiwiCo.com/nextrightthing. That's KIWI.CO.com/nextrightthing to get started. Now onto today's episode, listen in.

If you follow me on Instagram @emilypfreeman, you may already know my weekly photo video look back practice. On Sunday nights since early April, I've been sharing on Instagram stories, snapshots and videos of my week. When I started this weekly rhythm, it was to break up the monotony of the quarantine life. But as I continued it, a few things surprised me. First, I will just say, it surprised me how often my cat made a number of cameos in this collection. He's become quite the star of my weekly look backs. But secondly, even though we didn't go anywhere during those months, not a single where, still my photos and images that I shared on Sunday nights, reflected life in color with specific moments and musings different from those that happened the weeks before, which again, we didn't go anywhere. So it seemed like every week should look the same, but they didn't.

And a final thing that surprised me, and this was the most surprising thing of all, was how much engagement I get on these reflection posts. More engagement than anything else that I've done on Instagram stories. This practice of reflection is not an entirely novel idea to me. If you've been around

here for any amount of time, you probably already know about my practice of recording what I learn every month, as well as how I share those lists and invite you to share yours at the end of every season. I place a high value on reflection. It comes pretty naturally for me and I embrace the words of a mentor of mine, Jan Johnson, who said “It’s not the experience that brings transformation. It’s our reflection upon our experience.”

John Dewey said something similar.” We do not learn from an experience. We learn from reflecting on an experience.”

I suppose you could argue with both of those statements as maybe you could name a lot of experiences where you learned in the moment as the thing happened. And of course, that’s true. But I think it’s unrealistic to depend on the experience itself to enrich, teach, nourish, and guide us in all in the moment as we live it. It often happens too fast or in the midst of a busy week or in a long string of monotonous days or in the excitement of a new relationship or the pain of a devastating loss.

We move through these experiences one after the other. And inevitably, we’re going to miss some of the details, the curves and the crevices, the nuance and the takeaways, our experiences, our plot points, but they are not the whole story. We need time and reflection to help us fill things out. Now, I do not advocate for looking at our lives through lesson-colored glasses, always trying to discern what we’ve learned in every single situation, but I will forever and always advocate for paying attention, for naming the unnamed griefs, longings, loves, and losses and these are names that don’t come quickly.

They usually come when we slow down, take a look back and begin to connect the dots after the moment has passed. I think one reason why these weekly look backs are resonating on Instagram is maybe not, I mean, maybe part of it is just because people are curious to see what my living room looks like, I don’t know, I share lots of photos of inside my house in ways that I haven’t done before. But I think beyond that, seeing kind of the regular moments of someone else’s life helps us recognize those moments in our own life. Now I’ve always been a list keeper and a journaler and this new, simple way of reflecting and sharing my moments on Instagram, well, that’s just been one more reminder that it doesn’t take much to feel human again. And those regular moments of my daily life, they’re meaningful precisely because they are not fancy.

So how can a weekly practice of reflection help us make better decisions? One common mistake we make when we have a desire to make good decisions is that we’re constantly trying to peer into the future to discover what might hold, what the outcomes we want to achieve are, and what roadblocks we wish to avoid. This is a natural tendency, and it’s often what we’re encouraged to do, but the only problem is the future hasn’t happened yet, so how can it possibly teach us? Instead of looking ahead and guessing about the outcomes, there’s something to be said for looking back and gathering information.

The best indicator of life giving decisions for the future is paying attention to choices we’ve made in the past. After the release of *The Next Right Thing* book in April of 2019, I heard from readers and friends who said they loved the prayers and practices at the end of every chapter, but they really wished they had a place to record their progress, capture seasonal reflections, and explore on a more personal level, the impact that their decisions were having on their everyday lives.

Not only did I nod my head in agreement, but these requests served as an invitation for me to dive even

deeper into my own practice of weekly, monthly, and seasonal reflection. Intentional list-making is a key part of my own decision-making process. And for years, I had several different journals for capturing these different kinds of lists and reflections. But if there's one thing I know for sure, it's that when we're suffering from either chronic hesitation or decision fatigue, the last thing we need is a stack of half-used blank journals to choose from.

We need prompts, we need guidance, and we need a dependable place to make a list. The good news is I have created the tool. I've always wished I had. It's a guided journal for decision making. And it's a place for you to keep your lists and reflections all in one place.

Now I'll share the details at the end of this episode, because it's a very exciting announcement, but broadly, I'll just say, now that this is a journal to help you discern your next right thing by paying attention to your last right thing and you're right now life.

Ideally this resource will be a kind companion for you over the course of a year, guiding you through monthly and seasonal questions, reflections, and intentions. The goal is not to work your way through it for the sake of finishing but to walk your way through it for the sake of listening to your life. But for now, for this week, as you move toward decisions in your own life, both the big ones and the small ones, let's take a look back before moving forward. So here are five questions to help you reflect on the last seven days.

We'll start simple.

Look through the photos that you've taken in the last seven days that marked the moments for you. What makes those moments meaningful?

In the last seven days, what was your favorite "yes!"?

When did you say a bold "no!"?

What is a moment within the last week that you hope you'll never forget?

As you look into the seven days to come, what's one question you're carrying with you?

May your moments, your past yeses and your past nos serve as clarity teachers as you discern your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 150 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of weekly reflection 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. ‘

Now, I hope this announcement about this guided journal is good news for you. A little bit about it: it's paperback with a bendable binding to allow you to write comfortably in it. If you ask me, there's nothing

more frustrating than to have a journal that will not lay flat. So no sirree on that. It's also a six by eight design. So it's a bit smaller than the trade book and is hopefully easy to fit in a bag or on a bedside table. The journal's divided into 12 months, but you fill the date in yourself.

So you could start in January or in May or June, or whenever you get it. What I love about this journal, aside from the size and design, is that we curated all of the lists mentioned in *The Next Right Thing*, all in one place. So there's a place for you to record your "These are the days of..." lists your life-giving and life draining lists, your monthly questions, and seasonal reflections. Your "What I learned" list and many more.

There's also a page for you to record every month what you're reading, listening to, making and watching. I can't wait to have this journal in my hands. It's not available quite yet. It will be available everywhere when it releases on January 5th. But if you want to make sure to have your copy ready when the new year begins, you can preorder it now. I've seen it on Amazon and Barnes and Noble, wherever books are sold. Place that preorder and get your guided journal on January 5th. The journal is called *The Next Right Thing Guided Journal: A Decision Making Companion*.

In the weeks to come, I'll be sharing more about it and answering your questions. If you have them again, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman and be sure you're signed up for my monthly letter where I share reflection questions every single month to help you look back before moving forward, as well as news and books I'm reading things that are coming up, you can be sure you're on the list to receive that letter at emilypfreeman.com/letter.

And I can't wait to share the journal with you in real life. I really look forward to getting my own copy, like I said, and it will be available January 5th, 2021, a great way to start the new year.

In closing, I'll leave you with a word from *The Next Right Thing* book, a reminder of the importance of stillness and decision making.

"Good decisions require creativity and creativity requires space. Stillness is to my soul as decluttering is to my home. Becoming a soul-minimalist does not mean that you should hold on to nothing but that nothing should have a hold on you."

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