



159: What We Made in 2020

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 159. This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. Every week, I invite anyone who struggles with decision fatigue or chronic hesitation to join me for a few minutes for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

This month on the podcast, I'm changing up the format a little bit and inviting you into a final mini-series, where I'm sharing some of my next right favorite things. Today's our final episode of the series and our final episode of the year. So far, I've shared my five favorite books I read this year, 10 favorite things I watched, five favorite things I listened to, and today, I'll share with you some things I made.

And so this is part four of a four-part mini-series, where I'm sharing these favorite things in honor of one of my favorite kinds of lists, what I call a happy list. Each month, I've been in the habit of recording what I read, watched, listened to and made. Because so often for me, those are the places where I find joy, renewed creativity, rest, perspective, and sometimes just plain fun.

Well, now I've made a place for you to record your own happy list in The Next Right Thing Guided Journal. If you haven't ordered your copy yet, you can do it today. It releases just one week from today on January 5th, 2021. And inside the pages of the journal, you'll find places to make all kinds of lists, many lists I've talked about here on the podcast. They're designed to help you look back before moving forward, and I hope that it will be a kind companion for you as you seek to make simple, soulful decisions in the year to come. You can get your copy and learn more about the journal at emilypfreeman.com/journal. Again, that's emilypfreeman.com/journal. Now on to today's episode, listen in.

In keeping with the format that we've established for this little mini-series of a happy list, I'm going to share seven things I made this year in no particular order, starting with number one. This year, we made food. I made a cake from scratch with Kendra's Blank Canvas Cake with Blank Canvas Buttercream. And while that might not seem like a huge deal, y'all, I can not remember the last time I made a cake from literal scratch. By the way, what is scratch? There's probably a story behind that. But anyway, I made a cake. It's Kendra's Blank Canvas Cake, along with the buttercream, highly recommend it. It turned out really great. It didn't look great, but it tasted great.

Another thing I made when the Starbucks was closed, Bri McKoy taught us how to make the Starbucks Doubleshot Iced Coffee from home, and it was delish. I wonder for you, what was a favorite food you

made this year?

A second thing, we made memories. One of my goals this year, and I quote, was to, “Spend more time at home,” done. I really wanted to be present for my girls this year, especially since at the time when I made that goal for the year, they only had two and a half years before they graduated high school. Now it’s just one and a half years. And this year, we made some memories around the dinner table, sitting outside for ice cream, taking walks around the block, staying up too late, driving to prepare for their driving test. It was a good year of making memories close to home, even though the reason we had to make those memories was less than ideal, but I’m grateful for it.

But one of my favorite memories this year was with Kendra, AKA The Lazy Genius, who I mention in every other episode, but it was in the parking lot of Target on her book launch night. She had been on a day-long tour around North Carolina to stop at bookstores that were open. Remember, this was August, so not very much was open.

She was wanting to sign some books at those bookstores and also take some social distance selfies with readers. And then her final stop was at our local Target, but instead of going inside, she took me with her and we parked in the parking lot and we put on Stories that we were there and if anyone wanted a signed book, they could come and find us, and then we waited. And in those 15 minutes in the car with Kendra, after months of not hanging out at all with anyone, but specifically not with her, those were some of the most normal, joy-filled moments of the year for me. Plus it was a super fun way to celebrate her incredible book, *The Lazy Genius Way*. Surely you already have it, but if you don’t, pick up a copy, it should be on everybody’s bookshelf.

I wonder for you, what was a favorite memory you made this year?

Number three, this year, we made art. There was about a month last spring where the internet was a frame for beauty, the artists and the makers, the doctors and the helpers, the singers, the teachers, the friends. The human spirit is relentless, and it reflects the heart of God. And I will absolutely never get over it. And though, as the pandemic wore on, things got a little more complicated and people got tired, rightly so, but it was really beautiful to watch people’s good side come out and everyone kind of trying to make the most of a really difficult, scary situation.

Now here, when I say we made art, I’m using a little bit more of a generous definition of art here. Not necessarily the type of art you would find in a museum or in a studio, but one where I refer to art as anything that makes you come more fully alive. For me, I have three things that I made this year that I’m going to call art. I finally made a family photo book. It’s been years since I made one. I use the Artifact Uprising site and I made a photo book of our summer of 2019, mainly because we spent a couple of weeks in London and I’d been meaning to make a photo book from that time since we got back, and I finally did it this year.

PS, I’ll put a link, it’s an affiliate link, but I’ll put it in my show notes to where if you use that link to make your own photo book or anything else at Artifact Uprising, then you can get \$20 off your first purchase. But that’s just a side note. You’re welcome.

A second thing I made that I’m going to call art is we painted our fireplace wall black. If you follow me

on Instagram, you've seen that fireplace wall way too many times, but essentially, we decided to put our TV above our fireplace, as one does circa the early 2000s, but I absolutely love it. I love having the focal point of the room be the fireplace, and then we're always facing it when we watch movies or shows. But I didn't like the idea of the big black TV hanging there on our, otherwise it was a white wall at the time. So we painted the whole wall and the fireplace brick black, and I absolutely love it. It's one of my favorite art projects of the pandemical times that we had this year.

Another thing I made was a new version of The Quiet Collection, which is no longer available because it was for Christmas, but I was really proud of it and I loved making it, and I hope those of you who received it enjoyed listening to as much as I enjoyed creating it.

And finally, another thing that I made, another work of art is I made a journal, and it's the Guided Journal that I've been telling you about. Y'all, it was March 16th, right after a trip to California in the middle of the earliest days of the pandemic, after everything had been shut down, and I had a deadline to meet and a journal to create. I got out the index cards. I organized my lists. I created the first rough draft version of The Next Right Thing Guided Journal right there in the middle of March on my living room floor. Basically, I created the journal I always wanted, a place to record what I'm learning, the questions I'm carrying, what I'm grateful for, and a happy list of things I'm watching, reading, listening to and making.

I wonder, for you, when you reflect on the year and think about the art you made, or maybe the art you didn't make, maybe that thing you most want to do, that thing you notice and think about and wish you could do, maybe you're actually made for it and you're being equipped to do it. Maybe now is the time to re-imagine what it might look like to finally pursue it. Because giving the world what you've got isn't selfish, it's generous. What was a favorite work of art you made this year?

The fourth thing we made in 2020, we made confessions. Number one, I confessed how much I still have to learn about racism in this country, about my own part in contributing to it and in working against it every day, and I confessed that Black Lives Matter.

Two, I confessed the words of Henri Nouwen, that the Christian leader of the future is called to be, quote, "Completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer, but his or her own vulnerable self, this is the way Jesus came to reveal God's love."

Three, I confessed that my morning routine had become more like a mourning routine with O-U-R and all my best laid plans needed to be set aside for awhile, while I cried and stared out the window and wrote haikus.

Four, I confessed that though God doesn't change, my ideas about God do change. And that doesn't mean God is different, it means I am. It means I'm growing and learning and maybe even taking some risks because God can handle it. It means God is better and bigger and even more present than I thought.

Five, I confessed I was lonely, and I heard from so many of you who were feeling lonely too, and this was before the pandemic started. When I mentioned in my newsletter of January of this year that I was struggling through a season of loneliness, I heard from friends, both near and far, whispering your own quiet confessions, "I'm lonely too." I wonder, for you, what was a meaningful confession you made this year?"

Five, we made decisions. We canceled plans. We got creative. We found new ways to connect. In the US, we decided on senators, governors, school board members, and a president. No matter who you voted for, you did the work to make the best decision you could make with the information that you had. We made last minute calls, choices without all the facts, and we learned how to walk in the dark. We made school rooms out of living rooms, and those tent forts that used to just be for play became necessity for getting through a hard day with our kids. We made the best of a difficult year, and as best we could, we did it together. Because decision-making is not only for leaders or bosses or presidents or for those for whom action taking comes natural, it's for all of us.

I had a conversation with my friend, Natasha, on IG Live the other week, and she asked me a question I haven't stopped thinking about. She asked how 2020 has been for me as a leader, entrepreneur and influencer? How's it been different? How's it been difficult? And I'm sure so many can relate to that question, as we all have various kinds of leadership roles in our own circles of influence.

For me, making decisions and learning how to navigate the tension of grieving in private while leading in public has been one of the most difficult parts of this year. It's not that I've tried to hide my sadness because of shame or embarrassment or anything like that. It's just that, first of all, I'm a slow processor anyway, and then any measure of sadness makes clarity even more difficult to find. Grief makes you tired and tired means it's hard to articulate even the simplest things. Yet the work continued.

An important decision I made this year was to be kind to myself, to continue to show up in the best way I could. Even when I was unable to fully participate, fully contribute, or fully articulate my ideas or even access my own creativity. What was an important decision you made this year?

Six, we made exceptions. My kids have been in 100% virtual school since March, and one of the things that I've been ever grateful for is the school decided not to penalize late work. There are all kinds of other difficulties with online schooling that I won't get into, but this one exception is a small mercy that I've been grateful for. Granted in some ways it's easier to get behind because there's not exactly a due date until the end of the quarter, but at least when they do get behind, they aren't in any trouble for it.

Sometimes inconsistency is actually wisdom. It means you're human, breathing, and paying attention. It means what was good for yesterday may not be good for today. It means blanket solutions aren't always ideal. It means even though the situation looks the same, the moment is different. This year, we learned how to make exceptions. This year, we learned that having a good system is not equal to living a good life and that sometimes the exception is vital to longevity. What is a significant exception you made this year?

Finally, number seven, we made progress. This was a year of small steps. Whether it's something physical, like healthy eating or an exercise routine, or maybe something more nuanced, like a relationship or a particular cultural conversation, this year taught me the importance of celebrating progress, any progress. It taught me that if I've been away from a thing for a while, I don't have to retrace my steps to get all the way back to the momentum I had before. I can return to something I value even when I've been gone for a really long time.

Starting again doesn't have to mean starting over. No matter how long you've been away, no matter how far it seems you've traveled from the routine or rhythm you once practiced, it's always only one step back

to find the life again. One step in the morning, one prayer in the afternoon, one word in conversation, one appointment on the calendar, one email, one sentence, one moment, one breath. Where have you made progress this year?

Remember it doesn't have to be impressive, fancy, or even externally measurable. Progress comes in all kinds of ways, like giving yourself grace where there used to be scolding, or taking a break where you used to push on. So here's to making food, memories, art, confessions, decisions, exceptions, and progress. We don't know what the next year will bring, what challenges or opportunities will present themselves, but we do know the safest place to be is now, and God is with us as we move into our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 159 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of reflection on what you made can be just one more rung on the trellis upon what your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, but the bigger truth is our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman, or if you want to learn more about The Next Right Thing Guided Journal, visit emilypfreeman.com/journal to pre-order your copy and see what's inside. The journal is essentially a rhythm of reflection made simple with a place to record seasonal, monthly, and weekly reflections, including some of the lists I've talked about here on the podcast, like your These Are The Days Of lists that I share on my Instagram stories on Sunday nights, or a gratitude list, a list of questions, a life energy list, a list of errors, a list of what you learned, and of course, a happy list. All these lists and more journaling prompts are included in The Next Right Thing Guided Journal.

I've been sharing what's on my happy list in this and the last three episodes before this, but even better is for you to make your own happy list. In The Next Right Thing Guided Journal, there's a two-page spread every month for you to record your own list of things you're reading, watching, listening to and making. I hope you'll get a copy wherever books are sold or visit emilypfreeman.com/journal to learn more.

In closing, here's a quote from the introduction of The Next Right Thing Guided Journal. "When we stand at the end of one season and the starting edge of the next, it's tempting to race right into the future without considering the season we've just moved through. But that costs us something and we may not realize it until we approach that same season a year later. Reflecting on a seasonal basis is a gift to your future self and can prevent over commitment to things that don't much matter."

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