



165: Journal Your Seasons

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 165.

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.

It may not come as a surprise to you, but our Next Right Thing community here is made up of mostly women. Over the years I've read many, many of your stories about your next right thing in my inbox and on Instagram, and I love that you trust me with your words. I love that your stories are about your careers, your hobbies, your relationships, and your children, whether you're in the thick of raising them or maybe even waiting for them to arrive.

That's why I'm delighted to introduce you to this episode's sponsor, Modern Fertility. Modern fertility is on a mission to help women better understand their reproductive health through their at-home fertility hormone testing kit. It's an easy and affordable way to test your fertility hormones at home with a quick prick of your finger. Mail it in with the prepaid label included in your kit, and you'll get your personalized results within 10 days. Your Modern Fertility results will give you insight into your reproductive timeline, hormone levels, and other important factors that affect the future of your family. They also provide access to fertility nurses who can review your results with you and identify proactive options and next steps.

Right now, Modern Fertility is offering Next Right thing listeners 20 dollars off the test when you visit modernfertility.com/nextrightthing. That means your test will cost 139 dollars instead of the hundreds or thousands, it could cost at your doctor's office. Get 20 dollars off your fertility test when you go to modernfertility.com/nextrightthing. That's modernfertility.com/nextrightthing.

Now onto today's episode, where we'll talk about how to journal for decision-making through the seasons. Listen in.

So I've never done a Q&A episode where I have you submit questions, and then I answered them on an episode. Aren't you glad that I just gave you the description of what Q&As are, like you didn't know?

Anyway, I've never officially done one, but today I want to go ahead and answer one question I've been getting a lot lately and it's all around this idea of reflection through the seasons and how to do it well.

For years and years, I've kept lists of seasonal reflection, mainly through the lens of what I'm learning. It started because I had this bright idea to take my cues from Oprah and do a series of blog posts, this was years ago, about what I knew for sure.

But writing down what you know for sure is not an easy task as it turns out. In fact, Oprah calls it one of her most embarrassing moments when film critic Gene Siskel asked her on live TV, what do you know for sure? And she didn't have an answer. After that, she thought a lot about what she knew for sure. And it became a staple interview question that she often asked as well as one that she answers herself in O Magazine.

But making a regular list of what I know for sure was not the practice I needed, and instead I was inspired to record not what I knew but what I'm learning. For a while I kept the list monthly, but over time I realized I personally needed a little longer runway to reflect on key moments, experiences and transformation in my life. It was more helpful for me to reflect on what I'm learning, not after every month, but after 90 days.

At the end of every season for years now, I've shared what I'm learning on Instagram and on my blog, and I've invited you to do the same. But back to the question, I'm getting a lot lately. It's about how and when to do that seasonal reflection practice.

Back in January, The Next Right Thing Guided Journal released into the world, and if you've never used a guided journal or have never heard of one, here's what this one is all about. It's a 12-month journal designed for weekly, monthly and seasonal reflection, like I said, over 12 months time.

Now the question I get a lot is since this is a seasonal journal, the question is, does that mean that I need to wait to start using my journal until the beginning of the next calendar season? The short answer is not unless you want to. A logical follow-up question could be, well then how can I start in the middle of a season when the journal is divided by seasons? Well I would love to answer that for you.

First and most importantly, let's keep the goal in mind. The goal is not to obey the calendar. The goal is to pay attention to your life.

When we stand at the end of one season and the starting edge of the next, it's tempting to race right ahead into the future without considering what we just lived through. But that racing costs us something and we might not even realize how much we've paid until we approach the same season a year later or several

years later and we feel like we're reliving the same issues that we've had. Same song, slightly different, but mostly the same dance.

Instead a regular practice of reflection and recording can help loosen up the rope patterns, the knee jerk reactions and the habits that we repeat just because we do. When it comes to making decisions for our future, this practice of reflection shines a kind light on decisions we've made in the past and how they actually turned out. So that's the goal, paying attention to your life.

As for the format of the guided journal, it has room for reflection, yes, for 12 months. But that can be any 12 months of the year. You can start at the beginning of February, March, April. It doesn't matter. The months are grouped three at a time with seasonal reflection afterward. But here's the invitation, don't let the word season box you in too much.

While I do suggest in the journal that you begin at the start of winter, spring, summer or autumn, remember seasons don't happen in one day's time. Technically there is a first day of spring, yes, but that's not really how we experience spring, is it? It's gradual, and your journal can be too.

If you don't have the journal yet, but you've thought you're too late since it's a tool for monthly and seasonal reflection, and here we are in the middle of a season, well, here are three options for you to think about. The first option is to remember, like I just said, that seasons aren't necessarily black and white. They don't necessarily start and end it's spring and all of a sudden it feels like summer.

So you may start like I did. For example, I started mine in December. So my winter is December, January and February, Northern Hemisphere. I'll begin spring in March. You can begin in February, and that would be February, March and April you would call your spring, or your autumn if you're in the Southern hemisphere. You can begin in April and April, May and June can be your spring. It can be, or your autumn accordingly. You can begin in June and June, July, August is your summer or your winter. You see how that goes.

You can just overlap your seasons there because by the end of 12 months time, you're going to cover them all. So you just choose which month you want to label and start with according to spring, summer, autumn and winter. That's option one, and that might be the most logical one.

But here's a couple of other options I wanted to submit to you, and you can see if these ring true for you. Option two, if you're a person of faith, particularly in a more liturgical tradition, you might want to label your seasons according to the church calendar.

Abby on Instagram, thank you, Abby, for the suggestion, says that she's doing just that. She's beginning with Lent and then the next season will be ordinary time one, ordinary time two, and the final season in her journal she is going to label Advent and Christmastime. I think that's an excellent option, especially if you are more liturgical and you already think of the calendar that way, or if you're someone who's been wanting to explore thinking of the calendar that way and you want your life to reflect that. That's a good option as well.

Option number three is another idea from a listener on Instagram. She labeled her seasons according to what was happening in her life. For her, that was a February cross-country move. So the first season in her journal was labeled simply, the big move.

You could do this according to the school semesters, phases of personal growth, goals in your business. Maybe for the next 90 days, you want to start a particular habit or train for some type of marathon or begin work on a creative project. You can use your journal that way through the lens of whatever's happening in your life right now, and then label your season in a way that makes sense to you.

Instead of the first season in your journal being spring, it could be called the season of writing the book or the season of saying, hello. It doesn't necessarily have to be according to the natural world around you is what I'm saying. It could be a lovely practice for you to name, discover, and put a title on a season that's happening in your life right now according to the world within you.

Now I realize there's some resistance to beginning in the middle of a calendar season, and this is a resistance that I understand. But it's also evidence of the fact that so many of us want to do this journaling thing right. And I'm here to tell you how you do it is the right way to do it. Because remember, the goal is to pay attention to your life, to recognize what's life giving and life draining during a period of time, and then to use that reflection to inform your future decisions.

The goal is to name what and who you are grateful for every month, to list what you've watched, read, listened to, and made that have been happy, informative, or challenging or joyful so that you can begin to incorporate more of those things into your life rhythm. The goal is to live your one life well, and to participate in it rather than letting it go by without you.

The goal is not to do this right. The goal is to do it, period. And that may mean letting go of the spring, summer, winter fall framework and jumping in right where you are.

We're conditioned to look for the right way. Even the name of this podcast might precipitate that for you, The Next Right Thing. But I often try to gently point out, for me at least, the emphasis is not so much on the word right, as it is on the word next. Of course, we want to do the right thing. But what is also the next thing?

As you think about that, here are some questions to carry along the way. As you pay attention to the season of your life, what do you see? What's one thing you've learned in the last three months? What's one question you're asking about your future? What keeps you up at night? What's one relationship you're grateful for? What change are you grieving? What's bringing you life today? What do you need? What do you want? What are you hoping for? May it be so in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Episode 165 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of journaling through the seasons 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 deeper truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

As always, you can find me @emilypfreeman on Instagram or at emilypfreeman.com. And if you haven't picked up a copy of The Next Right Thing Guided Journal yet, what are you waiting for? I hope you get it, and as you now know, you can start at the beginning of any month and name your seasons however you want.

As of right now, today, February 9th, 2021, the only online retailer that has books in stock is Amazon. So many people bought books when it was released that we have to now wait for a second printing to be delivered to the publishing house warehouse, and that's supposed to happen within the next week or so. But until then, you could check your local brick and mortar bookstores, or of course, Amazon, to get your copy today.

In closing, here's a quote from Eugene Peterson in his book, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*. "We are created to live rhythmically in the rhythms of creation. Seven days repeated in a sequence of four weeks, place us in the rhythm of the 28-day phase of the moon circling the earth. We are immersed in rhythms. But we are also composed of rhythms. Physiologically, we live out rhythms of pulse and breath. Our hearts beat subtly, circulating our blood through our bodies in impulses of 60 or 80 or 100 times a minute. We are embedded in time, but time is also embedded in us."

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