



169: Create Your 10 Minute Evening Routine

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to the Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 169.

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, I want to tell you about this episode's sponsor Modern Fertility. Modern Fertility is making it easier than ever to discover insights about your hormones and fertility. This means you can approach family planning with the information you need to make decisions about what life could look like for you without making an extra trip to your doctor or paying hundreds for testing. With their at-home fertility, hormone testing kit, you can learn all about your egg count, menopause timing, and what your hormone levels indicate about your overall health with just the prick of a finger.

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

Now, onto today's episode. Listen in.

Where are you stuck? When I asked that question on Instagram at the beginning of the year, reader Jen had a perfectly practical answer. She wrote, "I simply want to go to bed earlier so I can rise earlier. I think the biggest hurdle is starting the wind down earlier while still having time with my family."

Well, after she wrote that comment, over 200 people clicked like on the comment, which for that post was the in-person equivalent of nodding your head and saying "Me, too." Because I asked people to tap the heart on the responses that represented where they felt stuck, too.

Now, I've done several episodes about morning routines, starting with Episode 76, create a simple morning routine; Episode 90, start with a simple rhythm; and 141, redo your morning routine. Kat Lee, who's the author of *Hello Mornings*, says this about a morning routine. She writes, "The goal of morning routine isn't overnight transformation, but slow and steady progress toward lifelong habits that radically change the direction of our lives and allow us to thrive in whatever role God has given us." I appreciate Kat's emphasis on slow and steady progress toward lifelong habits. 10 minutes might not make a huge difference for one day, but 10 minutes every morning over three months or three years, well, that could make a huge transformative difference not only in how you spend your days, but also in the person you're becoming.

So if the job of your morning routine is in many ways to open the day, then it makes sense that the job of your evening routine would be to close it. Full confession, I am not great at closing the day. I have some rhythms that I found work for me over the years, but evening rhythms do not come as naturally to me as do morning ones. Our days are sticky, and by the time the day's done, we've had hours of input that come in the form of conversation, decisions, conflict, work, school, errands, caring for the needs of other people, the needs of ourselves if we can fit it in, keeping small humans alive, and just generally being a person.

By the time the evening finally comes, depending on season of life, I, personally, have two extreme tendencies. One of my tendencies is I don't know when to call it quits on the work and all the activity, so instead of closing the day with one final email or a turned off light in my office, I let the work kind of trickle into the evening by checking an email here on my phone, or leaving my office door open because I'm going back and forth.

But the other extreme is the exact opposite for me. I'll completely shut down all grown-up parts of my brain, and then I'm unavailable for any meaningful connection with anybody in my family, and I just want to lay on the sofa like a dog. Both of these options are options that I've taken, but they are not the options that I like.

Jen's question on Instagram took me down the road of exploring the art of the evening routine. Now, there are hundreds of different ways to approach this. We could talk about why a routine is helpful, what a routine can accomplish, and not to mention all the elements that could make up a life-giving evening routine.

But rather than try to fit everything into one episode, I'm going to choose a narrow angle for this one, and that's baked in to Jen's question, which is about winding down. Specifically, how can we create a wind down routine that's accessible and repeatable, no matter our season of life?

Now, your overall evening rhythm might take two, three hours depending on what you call evening. And now that's your evening rhythm. There's a lot of potential activity between, say, the end of a Workday or a school day and your bedtime, the time you go to bed. That's a lot of potential hours that you could call your rhythm or your nighttime time.

Before I even begin to give you any guidance in creating an evening routine, I first want to point out that you actually already have one. You may not like your current routine, it might not be working for you, but you do have one. So your next right thing isn't just for me to tell you how to build one from scratch.

Instead, it could be helpful for you to notice what are you currently doing that's not working for you and why? And then maybe even consider what is working for you or what has worked in the past, and let that be a starting point. Then begin to do it on purpose.

A great resource about routines in general that I want to recommend is a post written by our beloved Kendra Adachi, *The Lazy Genius*. It's called *The Universal Path to a Life-Giving Routine*. Hello, she covers it all. She wrote this three years ago, but it's timeless and super helpful, and you should check it out as she really goes into the overall importance of routines in general and how they can help you name what matters. We'll link to it in the show notes. Thank you, Leah, for putting that there. But the post is called *The Universal Path to a Life-Giving Routine*.

Well, if her post is a big picture overview, then this episode is one small way to apply those principles to an evening routine that can help you wind down. Your rhythm of life is, to me, like a trellis, and an evening routine could be another rung on that trellis. Your life, your decisions, the way you move through the world, those things are fluid and living like a vine. But these small practices and routines that you set up and plan for can be grounding touch points, something to count on, no matter what the day brings.

So, first, two things to consider, and then I'll share five steps to create your 10 minute evening routine. We've got lots of numbers in today's session.

First of all, a question of when. You get to decide when you want to do your evening routine. Is it just after dinner? Is it after you put the kids to bed? Or you or your partner gets home from work? Is it after you walk the dog, or take a shower, or the 10 minutes before you turn off your light for the night? There's really no wrong way, there's just your way, and I would recommend you choose a time to begin to practice your evening routine.

The first step for creating a simple routine is to decide your personal parameters. When do I want to practice it? Now, for you, this could be determined by your why. And that's a second thing to consider. When Jen left that comment about where she was stuck, she said, "I want to get up earlier," and so she wanted to go to bed earlier. She said, "I want to start the wind down sooner in the evening." I heard this actually from a lot of you on Instagram. We want to close the day well, because when we do, we like it. We rest better. We feel like we aren't wasting our time. We don't have as many regrets.

So rather than giving you guideposts to design your entire evening, I wanted to narrow it and give a simple framework that you can personalize for a 10 minute evening routine that you can do anywhere in any season no matter where you are, who you're with or what's gone wrong. What you need to remember is five, four, three, two, one. Simple, right? Let's fill it out.

Five is root. Check your five senses. Whenever you want to start your 10 minute evening routine, set a timer for 10 minutes, at least to start out. Now, it doesn't have to be exactly 10 minutes, but just for the sake of giving yourself a 10 minute window of time, I think it can be helpful to start out with a timer. And when you begin the timer, do a body scan and ask yourself what is the next right thing for your body in order to transition into rest for the night. That doesn't mean that as soon as you do this scan, you're going to hop into the bed, but it does mean you're getting ready.

So the five senses. Feel in your body. Do you need cozy socks or jammies on? Or another night, it might be I need to take a lap around the col-de-sac before I begin to wind down for the night. There's no wrong. There's just paying attention to what you're feeling in your body.

Consider taste. Do you have an evening tea routine that you want to introduce into your life? Do you take melatonin? Do you want to brush your teeth right now? Maybe, maybe not. That's up to you. Consider the taste.

Smell. Maybe there's an essential oil that you like. Especially, I know people recommend lavender, or maybe you want to light a candle because you have a certain seasonal scent that you like to have in the evening time or the certain time of year. So consider the smell.

Also, your eyes. Remove any visual clutter from the space right around where you will settle in for the night. For me, that's my nightstand. I just like to kind of clean off my nightstand before I settle in for the night, and that's just a quick removing a visual clutter. That is not cleaning the whole house.

And then, finally, consider your sense of hearing or listening. For you, if you do your evening routine right before you get into the bed, this might be you putting on a sound machine or some white noise. But if your evening routine is earlier in the evening, maybe it means this is when you turn on your seasonal playlist. Again, there's no wrong. It could just depend on what time of night you choose to do your evening routine, but what's some way that you can engage your sense of listening or your sense of hearing?

Now, that took me a couple of minutes to explain, but it shouldn't take a few minutes to do. It's feeling, taste, smell, see, hear. Root. Root down. Pay attention to your body. You may have gone the whole day and never considered the body that you're walking around in. And maybe part of your evening routine first step is just to pay attention. Here I am, a human person in a human body, and what does that mean for my five senses.

All right. That's five.

Now, four. Reset.

You know how they say "Begin with the end in mind?" Well, here, we're going to end with the beginning in mind. And the way to do that is to think about what needs resetting tonight so that tomorrow I can begin with ease.

Now, I have this as number four, reset. You might choose to reset before you do your five senses, and that's totally fine. You can change the order of any of these, but five senses is five. And I wanted to count down from five, so I'm going to leave them in this order, but just know you might want to reset before you root down. And again, that's up to you. Some areas where you might consider resetting, I'll name four, because we're on number four, but you can do one of these, or none of these, or just a couple.

Number one, your people. You might just want to check in with your people during this little 10 minute evening routine, or send a text to a friend to confirm a meeting tomorrow. Just real quick, a reset. You might want to consider your place. Clear the decks for morning success. You might want to take a few

minutes and rinse out your coffee mug for the morning, or set the coffee up so that it starts automatically the next day.

Number three, you might want to consider your plans. Just review the schedule. It doesn't mean write out a whole schedule, or redo things, or send a bunch of emails. It's just take a glance at that schedule so you know what's coming.

And, finally, priorities. Jot down your to-dos for the morning just to get them out of your head so that you're not laying there trying to fall asleep tonight, And you're writing down your to-dos in your imagination. Just give yourself time in your 10 minute routine to jot down a few to-dos that come to mind.

So, again, number four is reset. Ending with the beginning in mind. What needs resetting tonight so that tomorrow I can begin with ease? The four categories, by way of review, people. Check in with your people. Place. Clear the decks for morning success. Plans. Review tomorrow's schedule. Priorities. Jot down any to-dos. That's number four, reset.

Number three, reflect. I'm going to give three questions that you can ask yourself as you review your day. Now, there's nothing magical about three, and there's nothing magical about these particular questions. However, I do think sometimes it's helpful for us to get into the regular practice of reviewing the day in very specific ways so that it will help inform our decisions tomorrow.

For example, three questions. The first question could be, what's one thing that wore me out today? The second question, when did I feel most like myself today? And third, where did I see God?

Now, the first question, what's one thing that wore me out today, that might be a question for your body or your mind with something that just made you really tired. It could be a great tired, it could be a really hard tired, but that's a question for your body.

The second question, when did I feel most like myself, this is more of a soul question. Personality, or gifting, or an area of leadership. What did you do today, and the manner in which you did it, you showed up in a way that you felt fully you. Those are good things to note.

And then, finally, where did I see God? And this is a question for your spirit. Noticing where God is showing up in and around you. If I don't take time to pause, I can go through days on end without ever stopping to recognize where, when, and how God was with me in the midst of my active life. So these can be three simple questions to review each night. And, again, you don't have to write them down if journaling is not your thing, or if you do write them down, you might just write one sentence or bullet point. But even if you don't write them down at all, they can just be three questions to review and reflect in this 10 minute evening routine.

These might even be three questions that you ask yourself while you're doing another part of your evening routine. Again, it doesn't have to be fancy or formal, but you might be someone who really needs that few minutes where you're writing down what's one thing that wore me out, when did I feel most like myself and, where did I see God? And you just want to have those written down for record in your journal. There's no wrong. There's just a simple time to reflect in that 10 minute evening routine.

So we've done five, four, three. Now, two. Respond. This is what I call the two-line prayer. Again, there's nothing spectacular in choosing two lines. There's no magic to it, and there's no wrong if you choose to do more than this. But I find it helps me to keep things simple. Two lines. One line of gratitude and one line of worship.

The first two verses of Psalm 92 say it is good to praise the Lord and make music to your name, oh most high, proclaiming your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night. It helps me to take that literally. And so when I think about the evening time, I consider God's faithfulness, and that's where the two-line prayer can come in. What's something I'm grateful for, and what's one way to offer that gratitude to God and praise God for his faithfulness, for his love, for his beauty, for his friendship? Two-line prayer. It can be a borrowed prayer. It can be two lines of a psalm. It can be longer than two lines. But in the 10 minute evening routine, this is something that you can do no matter where you are, who you're with, or what's gone wrong.

And then, the one is an invitation to relax. This might be the part where you actually go to bed and turn off your light, but it might also be now when you sit with your person and you talk about the day, or you watch a show with your family, or read a book. The four steps before this are your wind down to the relaxing.

I get myself in trouble when I try to move too quickly without much runway between the activities of the day and getting the kids set, and finishing up cleaning up the kitchen or whatever the case may be, and then thinking, okay, now it's time to relax. That doesn't work for me. I need a little bit more of a runway, but if I have too much runway, then I tell myself I don't have time, and then I don't do anything at all.

That's why the 10 minute evening routine, I think, is so helpful is because it gives us a slot for all the things, body, soul, spirit, and also a little bit of planning, but it's not too much. And it's approachable and accessible to me.

I like this 10 minute evening routine framework because every night is not the same. If you're a parent, things come up with kids that you can never really control. Some nights people have practice. Others, you might work late, or have meetings, or class, or church. 10 minutes is a friendly amount of time. It might not change your life today, but do it for a month and it could make all the difference.

Five, four, three, two, one. Root, reset, reflect, respond, and relax.

Maybe your next right thing is to set that timer for 10 minutes this evening and ask yourself, what does my body need? What needs to be reset tonight so that I can begin tomorrow with ease? What's one thing that wore me out today? When did I feel most like myself? Where did I see God? What's one thing I'm thankful for and one true thing about God I can praise him for? And what does it look like for me right now to truly relax?

As you give yourself permission to try this simple routine, may you remember to be gentle with yourself as you root down and pay attention to your five senses. As you reset and consider the day to come, as you reflect on the day you just lived through, as you respond to God in a two-line prayer, and as you begin to relax, may you be ever more aware of how God is with you. Present and ready. God does not shame you for being a mess, and doesn't ever expect perfection on any front. God is simply delighted to be with you

as you continue to discern your next right thing in love.

Thanks. You're listening to episode 169 of the Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of creating a 10 minute evening routine 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 at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram @emilypfreeman, where I'm always getting new ideas for podcasts episodes. The Next Right Thing is produced by my friends at Unmutable and a special thanks to my copywriter Leah Jarvis who faithfully creates our show notes and ensures these episodes make it from our computers to your ears.

In closing, here's a word from GK Chesterton, which is a good reminder when we're framing our days and our nights.

When it comes to life, the critical thing is whether you take things for granted or take them with gratitude.

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