



Episode 30: Hold One Thing At A Time

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to *The Next Right Thing*. You're listening to episode 30.

If you're new around here, welcome! I started this podcast back in August because everything I was trying to write at the time didn't want to be written, it begged to be spoken.

As a writer, this confused me but as an artist, it intrigued me. And so I listened to what this work wanted to be and, after a long period of waiting, we landed here together with a podcast dedicated to helping ease the decision fatigue epidemic that, if you ask me, is silently crushing our souls one unmade decision at a time.

So here we are, 30 episodes and over 600K downloads in, I'm pausing here at the top of this episode to offer you my most sincere thank you, you are kind listeners. You have left reviews, you have shared episodes with your friends, and your mamas, your Instagram followers. You have sent me thoughtful and encouraging notes and emails and private messages that have let me know how this podcast is truly helping to calm some of the decision fatigue that you experience in your day-to-day life.

I am thrilled to know it, grateful to host this space, and honored to have you join me on Tuesdays as we continue to receive some rest from our decision fatigue as we are gently reminded together to simply do the next right thing.

As I've said before that is a phrase that's been used by Mother Teresa, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Theodore Roosevelt, Elisabeth Elliot, and Anne Lamott. These are just a few people that I know for sure who have said it.

It's a guideline for living in Alcoholics Anonymous, and it's become a common catchphrase

for coaches and athletes, in boardrooms and corporate motivational speeches. It's basically everywhere.

My favorite version of this short advice comes from Brennan Manning in his book, *The Furious Longing of God*, where he says this, "I've decided if I had my life to live over again, I would not only climb more mountains, swim more rivers, and watch more sunsets . . . I would not only go barefoot earlier in spring and stay out later in the fall; but I would devote not one more minute to monitoring my spiritual growth . . . What would I actually do if I had it to do all over again? . . . I would simply do the next thing in love."

Well, you know I love that.

In my experience, a practical roadblock of doing the next thing in love is we are carrying too many things in the first place. What if we gave ourselves permission to hold just one thing at a time? Let's practice doing that together today.

PS - I'm trying something new today. I've created a free companion download that goes with this episode I'll tell you more as we continue but for now just know you can grab that guide in the show notes of this episode, episode 30 at thenextrightthingpodcast.com. OK, let's go.

I'm reading this book called *I Told Me So* all about self-deception. Brilliant title, right, I just absolutely love that title. In it, the author says something I thought would be interesting to you as you consider the decisions that you make in your life.

He says this, "In recent decades, psychologists have argued convincingly that, more often than we think, we are guided not by reasons but by affect, emotion, and gut instinct. Interestingly, though, we tend to resist this explanation of our own beliefs and decisions. We prefer to think of ourselves as having conscious reasons for what we believe and what we do."

Alright, so when I read that I had to highlight it and put NRT right next to it which is how I label all the things that I want to talk about on The Next Right Thing Podcast.

This is why pro-con lists don't work so great see Episode 3 if you want to know more about that. When we make those kinds of lists, what we're usually evaluating is reasons for or against something. But if the psychologists are right and the real test of our decision is affect, emotion, and gut instinct, then wouldn't it be important to better understand how we feel about things and where our gut instincts are leading us?

Even if you don't take the time to uncover the truth about how you feel about the decisions you face every day, I can tell you who *is* doing that kind of work and doing it quite well. Every single marketer on this planet. Anyone who has ever tried to sell you something I promise you has thought about how you feel maybe even more than you have. They know probably better than you and I do that we don't tend to buy based on practical reasoning (this is what you need, I will buy it) rather you tend to buy things, especially an impulse buy, based on instinct and desire.

The way we move through our days is probably a lot more instinctual than we care to admit. We like to think we have clear reasons for things when in fact, most times we are just feeling our way through it.

Do I feel safe? Do I feel seen? Do I feel heard? Do I feel in control? Will I be rejected in this situation? Will I be good at this or will I look like a fool? Will I feel loved or will I feel forgotten? Will I be competent or ill-equipped? Do I have what it takes?

Now it's true on the surface, your decision could be as simple as deciding to join the PTA or not to join the PTA. But deeper down and further in, it's not always so clear cut.

This is under-the-surface stuff, things that only rise up when beckoned and invited. Like a child who hesitates to enter a loud room filled with angry, busy grownups, the soul won't come out unless we quiet down, get still, and stop talking.

Today rather than tell you one of my own stories or the story of someone who has inspired or encouraged me, I want to guide you through telling yourself *your* story, particularly as it relates to a decision you're carrying today.

I am never more open to advice, to perspective, and to other people's opinions than when I have a decision to make. I'm never more aware of my need for God, for hope, and for direction than when I have an unmade decision. I'm open, I'm ready, I'm listening for any clue as to what I should do next.

But often the clues remain within us, unheard and undiscovered. When we take the time to follow those clues we might find out things we are holding onto that we no longer need and what desires we might need to lean into and where we might need to let go?

Wouldn't it be so great to take your next right step with this decision you are carrying and to do it today? If that sounds good to you, I'd really like to help you do that.

This practice I'm about to share with you is available for you to download. Of course, you can listen to it without the download, but if you're listening and you feel the urge to grab a pen and take some notes, I've made that easy for you by writing down each step in this simple process with a little bit of space to write. You can get access to that practice by visiting thenextrightthingpodcast.com and just click on episode 30 to download.

But listen, if you aren't in a place right now where you can write things down right now, go ahead and listen in, but I want to encourage you to come back to this episode when you have a few minutes to yourself and go through the questions a bit more slowly.

To make it simple, we'll start by looking at 3 main categories of possible decisions that might be adding to your own decision fatigue.

Then, I'll invite you to choose just one and then we'll walk through this simple practice that I hope will help clear the clutter just a little bit.

Again, the point of this exercise is for you to hold just one thing at time. Fatigue in life sets in when we're doing too much. The same goes for our decisions. So, ready, here we go.

First, choose a particular decision you would like to focus on today using one of the following 3 categories.

1 - Deadline Decision

This is a decision that you know you have to make - it has a deadline, maybe people are waiting for you to decide the thing, maybe the deadline has even passed and the lack of a definite answer is keeping you up at night.

This has a timeline attached to it, for example, if you're wanting to enroll in a class let's say, there is an enrollment date you have to consider. Or maybe you've been offered a job and you have to give an answer by a particular date.

These are just some examples of deadline decisions that you might have that are sort of taking up some space and the longer you put it off, the more stressed out you feel about it. It could be a huge and looming decision that you've put off for months but in general, if you are going to choose a decision from this category this is a type of decision that will not wait for you. You have a deadline. You have to make it. And once that deadline passes, it's going to be too late.

So, that is the first category of decisions to think about.

2 - Dream Decision

The second category is more of what I'm calling a dream category. This is different from a deadline decision, this one might live only inside your head. So if you never decide to move on it at all no one would ever know. Maybe this one feels more delicate or vulnerable.

Unlike a deadline decision, this decision *will* wait for you.

Maybe you've closed it into a room that you rarely walk through or even open the door to but you always feel it there beyond the door, facing your direction. If you don't check on it, it could live forever in that room.

This type of decision probably has more to do with desire than with duty. Maybe it's something you've wondered about but you haven't given yourself permission to explore.

Now I think in terms of writing a lot since I'm a writer, so an example of a dream decision for you could be that dream you have to write a book. There's no deadline to it,

maybe no one knows about it, and if you never act on it, no one will be there to miss it or to ask you about it.

But you know it's there and it's waiting for you to engage it.

If that's a decision that has been weighing on you lately, maybe today you are being invited to crack that door and look it in the face.

OK, so deadline decision, dream decision, or the third category and probably the more common category right now for a lot of us is in those daily decisions.

3 - Daily Decision

Maybe neither of these things are you maybe you aren't in a season of huge decision making or life transition.

Maybe for you, the decision fatigue is showing itself in smaller ways just in the daily schedule, the daily commitments that you have to make, and ongoing requests for your time. These keep coming up.

These daily decisions have some elements of both deadline and dream built into them. Some of them will wait for you, others won't wait for you. But they all weigh a little something, even if they don't weigh a whole lot taken individually as a whole, they add up.

An example of a daily decision is something that will impact your day to day life if you say yes or no to it.

For example, maybe I'm trying to decide if we should put our daughter back into piano lessons or not. Again, not life or death, but it keeps getting moved from one to-do list to the next to-do list. I haven't made the decision yet, so it keeps following me around and poking me on the shoulder.

Even small decisions weigh something. The more you put them off, the heavier they become. If you are in a habit of ignoring these or putting them off for later, then it's no wonder you're beginning to feel scattered and overwhelmed.

OK does that make sense? There are three categories of possible decisions you are considering right now. I know there are more than that but we are just going to choose from these three. They all have different weights and different urgencies attached.

Again, if you want help to walk through this practice, I have all of this written down for you in a free practice guide at thenextrightthingpodcast.com. Just click on episode 30.

So consider these 3 categories — deadline, dream, or daily — and hold in your mind just one category for now. Within that category choose just one decision. I know that you have a lot of decision to make, but for this exercise and the time we have together, allow yourself to focus on just one. We don't do that very often.

Decide what that is and write down if you can if it's a deadline, a dream, or a daily decision.

Next, I want you to write down what the decision is exactly. I just want you to be able to put it in clear English:

For example, you may write down:

“Deadline — Decide where to go for family vacation”

“Daily — Sign up for piano lessons or not”

Maybe it is a more vulnerable decision, like “Dream — Start a Bible study at church”

The idea here is to get specific and to hold just one decision at a time. So you have your category and you have your particular decision.

Now it's time to begin to discern how you feel about the thing.

As we move through this practice together, know there is nothing magical or even particularly creative about this, but also know there is often power in simplicity.

I'm trying to help you become present to one way you probably already tend to make decisions which is not by way of reason, but by affect, emotion, and gut instinct.

So here we go.

When it comes to this particular decision, release what you think you *should* do and get in touch with what you want.

To figure this out, I want you to answer a series of questions as it relates to your decision. Now, these aren't given in any particular order and one may resonate or help more than another depending on your decision category. But it could help you begin to dig through layers of reasons you don't need or care about in order to get down to determining your next right thing. Now go through them fairly quickly at first but at the end, we will review them again and I will give you a little bit of space to make sure you know how you feel about the thing and to really pay attention to the clues.

Remember, Jesus didn't ask the blind man, Bartimaeus, what do you believe? Or What do other people think you should do? He didn't even say "What do you think I think you should do?" He's Jesus, that seems like it would be a valid question \like, what does God want here?

But Jesus didn't ask the blind man about this faith. Instead, he asked Bartimaeus "What do you want? What do you want me to do for you?"

Just answering that question for a lot of us maybe for all of us, well, that requires faith all by itself. I share that story simply to remind you that getting in touch with what you want has value.

I know that I mention this episode all the time but if you want to dive deep into that question and want some more help to discern what you want in general, check out Episode 14 of this podcast, Know What You Want.

This question **What do you want?** maybe as far as you need to go in this process because immediately when you think about this decision that you have chosen and named, and you take a few seconds to consider if you even what to do the thing — maybe you've already got your answer.

Well, that's the first question.

Second question: **When you hold this one decision before you, pay attention to your body does it gently rise or does it slightly fall?**

Does something light up inside you? Or do you feel instantly heavy and overwhelmed?

Write down what you notice. Write down what happens in your body when you consider this decision you need to make.

If nothing happens at all, write that down, too. There's no wrong or right answer here. We are just being curious. We're just looking for clues.

Third question: **If you've been putting off making this decision, is there something you're afraid of? If so, what is it? Or maybe for you more importantly, who is it?**

Fourth question: **What is the worst thing that could happen as a result of your decision? What about the best thing?**

OK, so if your decision is a yes or no decision see if you can answer the question at this point: do you or do you not want to move forward with this decision - yes or no?

Don't concern yourself right now with the how of it. Simply allow yourself to answer *yes I do* or *no I do not*.

Write that down.

Maybe your decision has to do with another person, a place, a project, or an event for example, if it's more of a where to go, who to ask, or what to make, bring, or say kind of situation, you may not have all the information you need to make a clear cut decision today right now but at least you are more aware of how you *feel* about it.

If you have done this exercise and asked these question and you still can't make a decision today, write down a date you will make it by or the deadline when it needs to be made.

If you need more information to make that decision, write down the first thing you need to do. Just one thing that will take you one step closer to making this decision.

So for example, if you need to ask a question of someone, write down their name and your question. That's it.

If you have to look something up, write down what you need to look up.

If you have to do more research on this decision, write down what the research is.

This is not the place to write your massive to-do list. Instead, what is just one thing you could do next to carry you closer to having a decision made? Write down that one thing.

In essence, that action becomes your next right thing today. You may not have a decision made, but at least you know what to do next.

In closing, I want to go through some of these questions again, only this time I'm going to give you time between to go back over your answers.

When it comes to this decision, what do you want?

What would you like Jesus to do for you? Name it. Put it in English.

When you hold this decision, does your body gently rise or slightly fall?

Does something light up inside you? Or do you feel instantly heavy and overwhelmed?

Is there something you're afraid of? If so, what? who?

What is the worst thing that could happen?

What is the best thing that could happen?

O God, thank you for being with us as we carry our deadlines, our dreams, and our daily decisions.

We confess they are nothing unless they lead us back to you.

Hear our prayer.

Thanks for listening to Episode 30 of The Next Right Thing.

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, there are several ways to do that.

I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman

To connect weekly stay right here and subscribe to the podcast if you haven't yet. For the month of March we've been talking about things we can continue to let go as we make our way through this season of Lent I hope this theme will be an encouragement to you, especially if you have felt disconnected from the season or haven't had a chance to think much about the collective journey we are all on together toward Easter, renewal, and new life.

Something you may not know is at the end of every month I create a simple guide to that month's theme you can find at emilypfreeman.com — in January I made a Soul Minimalists Guide to Time Management, in February it was a Guide to Relationships and our Guide to Letting Go will be available later this week.

As you consider your own next right thing, remember most importantly, the Lord is always ever near.

In the words of Psalm 91,

“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust.”

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.