



Episode 34: Pick What You Like

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 34.

If this is your first time joining me, I'm especially glad you're here. I often say this is a podcast for the second-guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue.

But I've heard from enough of you to know that even if you aren't one to second-guess yourself or if you never have trouble making a decision, still these few minutes we have together on Tuesdays could also be the white space you need in your day, a speed bump in your week, a few minutes break from the constant stream of information and entertainment.

The internet tells us adults make over 30,000 decisions everyday but when we are in the midst of a major life transition where we find ourselves starting over in some way, the number of new decisions goes up and the weight of the *usual* decisions are heavier.

If you are in a position where you find yourself starting over in an area of your life, you are a prime candidate for decision fatigue.

In the last several episodes, we've been circling loosely around the topic of starting over, of being a beginner, and of discerning our next right thing as we walk into new territory. Today, I hope you'll feel encouraged to see what this transition has to teach you instead of running past it in excitement or running from it in fear.

So, let's lean in and become curious again.

It's Saturday and I'm standing in the middle of the garden center, frozen. I have one plant in my cart, a tiny bright green ivy that caught my eye. Beyond that, I'm stuck and begin to feel that familiar discouragement I get when confronted with a simple decision that has many options in an area where I don't have a lot of confidence.

A week ago, I walked with John through the bright warm streets of the coastal city of Coronado situated right across the San Diego Bay from downtown San Diego. It was our last day in California and we spent it browsing the shops and taking our time, enjoying the company and the scenery. From the rocky coastline to the constant cool breeze, California doesn't mess around. It's beautiful, I would even call it enchanting in some ways, and I found myself paying attention to both the grand things and the small things that made an impression.

We come from the exact opposite coast, the southeastern part of the United States, where the air is mostly thick, the trees are tall with lush green leaves, the hills are gentle, and where every yard has grass. Here in Southern California, it became a game to try to find a yard with grass. Mostly we saw geometric rock gardens, thick, hardy plants with waxy type leaves that I didn't hardly recognize and vibrant, bold colored flowers.

Dear California, what you lack in grass, you make up for in succulents. In front of nearly every store was a pot or container with a collection of succulents Irish Mint, Little Jewel, Painted Lady. By the way, succulents have the best names.

Walking those streets, I decided when we got home, I needed more plants in my life. I could picture in my mind what I wanted, I could imagine going and picking things out and filling our house and porch and yard with green in every shade. I was happy about it, I was looking forward to it, and I was glad to get started.

That brings us back to me, standing in the garden center, frozen.

The discouragement barreled down fast. It was familiar, it was annoying, and it was kind of ridiculous. Because it's one thing to feel overwhelmed in a new situation that like I don't know, matters like a new job, a new role in life like a first time mom or just getting married or a new student or having a new business endeavor.

But it feels kind of dumb to let discouragement seep in for something as small as picking out plants. Still, that's where I found myself with a big idea, a lot of options, and an empty shopping cart.

For you, this kind of small scale overwhelm might not come when you pick out plants. Maybe for you it's something more like being in the grocery store or standing in your kitchen trying to cook.

Maybe it's related to which book to read next or how to wrap a gift in a pretty way without looking like a toddler did it or choosing a paint color for a room.

Though these situations are all pretty different, they also have one thing in common: they are all supposed to be fun, delightful parts of life. But instead, for some reason for some of us they take a turn into overwhelm, discouragement, and personal shaming.

What we hope will be life-giving just turns into one more decision we feel incapable of making. So the question for today is how to move forward as a beginner in areas where we may not feel a lot of confidence but *wish* we did?

One thing that makes this hard is this isn't the first time I've stood in the garden center with high hopes, only to feel incapable and overwhelmed once I got there.

What does it look like to just start or to start over, to take a next right step towards something we want even if we feel unsure?

Well, of course, I have a few ideas for us a simple 3-step path to moving forward when you feel unsure.

Number one, acknowledge the fear.

I can't tell you the number of times I've swept an emotion aside because it didn't feel valid. Overwhelm at the garden center? What a luxury! There are people with real problems in the world!

Well, that's true. What is also true is we can't move through what we refuse to acknowledge. And usually, the small things are simply arrows pointing to some bigger things.

Shame in the garden center is evidence of shame in other areas as well.

If my knee jerk reaction to a simple decision like picking out plants is shame and overwhelm, then can you imagine what my knee jerk reaction must be in areas of life that really matter and have consequence?

So take a moment and say - yes, I am feeling small right now. This decision that shouldn't be a big deal somehow and for some reason, is.

For now, this is what I know. So fear, I see you. I acknowledge you. But you don't get the final say.

Number Two, accept that you are allowed to be here.

Having pretty flowers, painting a room a bold color, or trying out a new recipe is not reserved for people who know more, who have more, or who seem to be more than you. This is for you, too. You don't have to be fancy, rich, chosen or special. You just get to be you.

You are allowed to be here, as Elizabeth Gilbert reminds us in her book *Big Magic*. You are allowed to take up space in the room. You are allowed to choose something and to change your mind.

You are free. You have options.

Finally, number three a phrase that came into my mind while I stood there looking at plants. "Pick what you like, then see how it grows."

I don't know when plant growing and picking got so complicated in my mind. But it did and admitting it is half the battle.

After that, it's just time to pick. Pick what you like, then see how it grows.

I also don't know why I've assumed that while it's normal to have to learn some things in life like how to read, how to write, how to use a computer — but that for some reason, taking care of plants should come naturally. No, it's not like that. This is also something that could be and if you want to should be learned. But we have to start somewhere and at the beginning is as good a place as any.

So pick what you like, and then see how it grows.

I started to put some plants in my cart. I grabbed one that said "I like low-light" and I thought of a place she could go. I picked another with the name "jenny" in it because that felt friendly.

Pick what you like, then see how it grows.

As I carried that phrase with me, as I pushed my cart past leafy greens and pretty florals, I thought of all the ways it can be true in lots of situations.

Need to cook for a group of people and worry how it will turn out? Trying to decide on a major in college next year? Have a day to yourself coming up and you don't want to waste it but you want to know how to spend it well?

Pick what you like, then see how it grows.

Yes. Just this. In as many situations as possible.

I know this little story is a small example for all the ways you may be starting over, starting again, or starting out for the first time.

No matter the size or scope, new beginnings always come with a mix of all kinds emotions.

Some of us carry new beginnings around with dread.

It will be an adventure! They shout from the sidelines. Don't they remember how hard this is?

Being new, being alone, learning all over again? The prelude to starting over is often one long measure of goodbye. We're supposed to be looking to the future with bright eyes and hopeful vision, but instead, we're lingering in the past, gathering up the moments we've just left behind.

Father, comfort us in our grief.

Sustain us for this new journey.

Energize us to lift our heads and take one step forward into today.

Others of us never thought this opportunity would come.

Starting over is a luxury we never thought we could afford. But then, a gift, a surprise, a miracle. And here we are, rich with opportunity, staring down a clean slate, holding on to forgiveness, standing on the edge of the brightest horizon.

For this, O God we thank You.

For this, we stand in awe.

For this, we pray for the courage to believe it's true and the wisdom to not make the same mistakes this time.

Starting over is joy and trepidation, dread and celebration.

Sometimes starting over is the opportunity we never wanted and other times it's the second chance we never dreamed we'd get.

As we stand at new beginnings and grieve those long goodbyes, teach us what it means to hold onto what we need for the journey and gently let the rest go.

Father, you bring new mercies every morning and give us the grace to start over as many times as we might need.

Keep pace with us as we learn to keep pace with You.

Thank You for not rolling Your eyes when we find ourselves here again.

Thank You for never leaving us alone.

Thanks for listening to Episode 34 of The Next Right Thing.

If you would like to connect beyond the podcast, I post almost daily to Instagram where you can find me @emilypfreeman and you can also find me over at emilypfreeman.com

We provide a transcript for every episode, so if you know someone who either can't hear or prefers reading to listening, you can download those transcripts at thenextrightthingpodcast.com. Just click on Episode 34 for this one.

As I've said before, it is an honor to help you create a little space for your soul to breathe each week though this might sound ironic seeing as how I've been talking for 15 minutes or so, I do see my work as a ministry of listening. If nothing else, I hope our time together helps you to listen to your own life with a bit more awareness and hope than you maybe would have otherwise done.

This podcast isn't the only way I do that, though. I am also, at my core, a writer. Every month I send out a letter where I share a short reflection, some first word news, and a list of the books I'm reading right now. If you'd like to receive that letter, visit emilypfreeman.com/letter - the link is right there in the show notes as well.

In closing, some final thoughts from author Leean Tankersley in her book, *Begin Again*. She writes:

“Let's be honest, that's what so much of life is — learning how, and learning how again, over and over. Each day is brand new, after all. We've never lived this day before... So this emphasis on the sacredness of beginning and beginning again . . . Was permission to be unaccomplished, to be a beginner, to be brand new. More than permission, too, a sense that I was right where I should be and that the beginning space was a holy space, not just a layover on my way to something better. Always we begin again.”

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