



Episode 78: Feeling Stuck - Start Again

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 78.

This is a podcast all about making decisions. It's also a podcast about making a life.

If you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation, or 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 few minutes each week, I'll offer you a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

If you're brand new around here, The Next Right Thing is not only a podcast, it's also a book. You can now get *The Next Right Thing* in a bookstore near you or at your favorite online retailer.

It just released last week so the newness is still lingering in our house. I had several congratulatory flower arrangements that arrived last week and just this morning I threw out the dying flowers and pulled out the ones that still had little life in them. And that green and white balloon arch that was the star of the book launch party if you happen to see pictures? Well, I have parts of it gracing our living room still because I cannot bear to part with it.

If you want to see photos from the night, I've got a post up on the blog with way more than you'll ever want to scroll through but we also recorded the night as well so if you haven't listened to the Bonus Live Show, it's the episode right before this one.

Speaking of bonus episodes, to celebrate the arrival of *The Next Right Thing* book into the world, during the month of April you're in for a few more surprise episodes than normal so stay tuned for those. This would be a good time to mention if you haven't subscribed to the podcast yet, do your future self a favor and hit that subscribe button in your favorite podcast listening app so that when those bonus episodes release, they'll magically appear in your podcast feed.

Well, this is the time of year where a lot of our schedules kick up to full gear and sometimes even the best intentions can leave us feeling stuck and overwhelmed. If that's you, today's episode is just for you. So, listen in.

Four years ago, at the beginning of 2015, I declared that I wanted to practice writing words I couldn't take back. I wanted to write consistently, without fear, without procrastination or second-guessing. I just wanted to write, and then I wanted to share my words when it made sense, and turn around and write again.

Daily. Consistently. With purpose.

You've probably set your own kinds of intentions like this as well maybe at the beginning of the year or at the start of a new season.

This time will be different I told myself. I'm going to do this thing and I'm going to succeed.

And by do this thing and succeeding, I meant I was going to write everyday and I was not going to fail. And so in 2015, that's what I did. Or at least that's how it started. I was consistent with my writing until I wasn't and I'm sure you can probably relate, the intention worked until it didn't work anymore.

I remember one morning I had grand plans to drive directly home and begin to write after I took kids to school, but instead I somehow found myself with one foot in a cute brown boot in the shoe aisle at Target at the productive morning hour of 8:15.

Two packages of poster board, one pack of stickers, a latte and a library book later, I sat in my home office wondering what is actually wrong with me.

I craved time to write when my family was home and then I promptly avoided it when the house was empty.

You probably have your own things like this, too. It may not be writing but maybe it's related with exercise, food choices, your daily routine, or other habits you're trying to cultivate.

I'm no habit expert, so if you want help establishing habits you'd do well to seek out Gretchen Rubin or James Clear.

But the small insight I have to add to the conversation around this endless cycle many of us find ourselves in is this: maybe the reason we often feel so stuck when it comes to making a change or turning over a new leaf is we're looking at it all wrong. We're addicted to the big picture.

When my right-now life and activity doesn't match up with the grand vision I have for myself, I'm tempted to quit altogether.

It feels like the gap between where I am and where I'm going is just too big.

One of our favorite TV shows is *The Last Alaskans* (Side-note: I feel like I'm always saying, "One of our favorite shows..." but this one really is one of our favorites!) It's a show that follows the lives of some of the last Alaskans who are allowed to live on the land in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in the Arctic Circle. When the current generation of these few families pass away, no one else will be allowed to live there.

Unlike some of the more sensational or exaggerated shows about Alaska that you can watch on TV right now, this one is slow and thoughtful. The scenery is breathtaking, the views cinematic, and the spirit of these families building their lives in what seems like the most remote part of our country maybe even the world is deeply compelling.

One of the couples on the show, Tyler and Ashely Seldon recently had a baby girl. Her name is Sydney and one episode shows them giving Sydney a bath in a little tub in their cabin. She was a baby, not yet crawling but old enough to sit in the bath at least, that is how I remember it. She wasn't falling over, she wasn't like an infant, but it struck me how as she sat there in the bath, they kept pouring water over her shoulders, over and over again as they talked to her and delighted in her tiny baby presence.

For a moment, I thought about how we do this, bathing babies so thoroughly but how dirty can a baby's shoulder really get? I know you new moms are rolling your eyes at me right now. I mean minus a major diaper blow out or a roll in the dirt, or all of the spit up that I know can collect in their baby skin folds, but really the back of the baby shoulder is probably the cleanest skin around.

But here they were, pouring the water over her soft shoulders over and over again.

I bring up that story in an episode about feeling stuck because I think there's something simple and sacred about this idea of starting again. I use the word "start again" rather than "start over" because starting over implied we have to re-traced the steps we've already taken, cover over all the same ground again when we now know from experience, some of that ground was ungracious to us and we don't have the energy to do all that over agin.

The water poured over that babies shoulders reminded me of the life-giving practice of starting again. We live the day and then we wash it off and start the day again.

It's a way to reset. It's a way to move forward. The sacred water washes us again even if the shoulder is not dirty. Even if the day was routine, there's something really lovely about pouring that water over the shoulder again and again for such a time as this.

We shower to get clean, but it may also have a healing effect. A reset of sorts, giving us the ability to see this thing we want with new eyes.

We pour water over our bodies, not because we have to start over, we are just starting again, moving along, one day at a time.

For my part and my intention back in 2015 to write consistently every single day, looking back I realize maybe I was trying to solve the right problem in the wrong way.

My desire was to write consistently and I translated that in my mind to mean "write every single day."

But what if daily writing wasn't necessary for me to get where I wanted to go?

Since 2015, I started this podcast, I wrote another book, I've created content weekly - both for a reader and for myself, privately.

But I haven't written every single day.

The consistency came because the intention remained, but I didn't reach my goal with the habit I thought I needed.

I thought I had to write everyday without fail.

Instead, it came about by simply doing the next right thing. And then again tomorrow.

If you keep falling short of your own desire for a new habit or intention, maybe it's time to ask yourself if this is the best way to get to where you want to go.

Maybe to write a book you don't have to write every single day without fail or else.

Maybe to declutter your house it isn't necessarily to spend 30 minutes everyday for a year.

I'm not saying don't set intentions. I am saying don't be a robot.

The reason why I often fail at some of the goals I set for myself is because I set a goal in January and lay down the steps I think will get me to where I want to go.

If you set a goal a month ago and haven't been able to meet it, it doesn't mean you set the wrong goal. Maybe it means you're measuring it the wrong way.

Maybe we don't need to plan so far in advance. Maybe we need to simply start again right now and then again in an hour. Each time asking ourselves one simple question: *what is my next right thing?*

This can be especially true if you are in the midst of a major transition, if you are in the midst of a new diagnosis. If the plan you planned isn't the plan anymore and you have no idea what's next.

And if you're left feeling like that isn't enough direction, if you worry that you can't trust yourself to discern even the next right thing, remember your friend Jesus is ever present with you, always ready, always watching, always eager to lead.

He might challenge you and he might invite you to a place you hadn't thought of yet, but he will never trick or tease you. That's not his way. If you don't know even the next right thing to do today, ask your friend Jesus what he might have to say.

And once you ask the question, go on with the day as normal. Run your errands. Drive to the office. Help with the homework. Pay the bills. Because when you're feeling stuck and don't know what to do next, maybe it's not time to do anything new.

Wait a beat. Take a breath. Receive the healing waters of starting again — not all over, just right now.

And then again tomorrow.

Thanks for listening to Episode 78 of The Next Right Thing.

As always you can find me at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram @emilypfreeman where from now until the end of April I'm hosting a casual instagram challenge using the hashtag #mynextrightthing where I'll give you one simple prompt everyday based on each chapter of *The Next Right Thing* book. You can join in any time - all you have to do is use the hashtag MyNextRightThing and tag me @emilypfreeman — you can visit my profile to see the daily prompts and play along.

A special thank you to Kellie who has been listening to the audio version of The Next Right Thing. She says:

“This is the book I didn't know I needed. Truthfully, I ordered it to support Emily Freeman. I also knew it would be useful when coming alongside other women I work with. What I didn't know was how listening to Emily Freeman's soothing voice and wisdom this morning is helping to breathe life and God's truth back into my heart. This is so much more than an aid for decision making. It is poetry. It is love. It is a soft arrow that points hearts to the Lord, His truth, His plans, and His love. I simply had no idea what a gift it would be.”

Kellie, I'm so glad to hear that and for any of you listening who may also need a little hope in the midst of a busy time, a foggy transition, or an uncertain future, I hope you'll grab a copy of *The Next Right Thing*, available now in bookstores across the country like Barnes and Noble and Books A Million, as well as most airport bookstores - so if you're traveling, sneak into one of those and get a copy. You can also, of course, grab a copy online. If your online retailer says they're out of stock no worries. More copies are on the way! You shouldn't have to wait too long.

In closing, I'll leave you with these words from The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous that refer to recovering from alcoholism but really could be applied to any addiction we want to break ties with:

“Suppose we fall short of the chosen ideal and stumble? Does this mean we are going to get drunk? Some people tell us so. But this is only a half-truth. It depends on us and on our motives. If we are sorry for what we have done, and have the honest desire to let God take us to better things, we believe we will be forgiven and will have learned our lesson . . . Faith did for us what we could not do for ourselves.”

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