



04: Record What You Learn

Indecision is often a direct result of overwhelm. Even the most grounded and professional among us can suffer from decision fatigue given the right circumstances. In today's episode, we'll take a look at what happens in otherwise sane people when we are hit with unexpected overwhelm, and I'll share a few tips to ease the burden of hustle when it comes. And it always comes

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode four, Record What You Learn. If this is your first time listening in, this is a podcast for the second-guessers, the chronically hesitant, or anyone who suffers from decision fatigue. If you're in a season of transition, waiting, general fogginess, or if you've ever searched how to make a decision on the internet, you're in the right place.

We've all stood behind them in line at the fast food restaurant, the person who can't decide what to order. Why are they taking so long staring at the menu? Could it possibly have changed since the last time? Are they visiting from the moon? Well, I can tease that person who's unable to decide what to order, but the truth is I've also been that person standing in line at the Wendy's, staring at the menu as if they've now decided to serve gourmet fish instead of burgers and Frosties like forever.

It's true. Some of us have a natural hesitation when it comes to decisions of all kinds. We like to keep our options open. We don't want to choose a meal we'll later regret. Other times though, the hesitation isn't a personality quirk, but a symptom of a deeper issue: grief, life transition, or general overwhelm. It's why you don't say to new moms, "Let me know if you need anything," because the truth is they need everything, but they don't have the brain cells to tell you what they need. So they say nothing.

It's why when someone is grieving, you don't ask them what they'd like to eat. You just make something and you don't get your feelings hurt when they don't eat it at all, because it's really your presence that counts. It's also why when your own soul is stuck in hustle, doing The Next Right Thing is both the best advice and the last we tend to take, partly because we often aren't aware of how stuck we are. I have countless examples of this from my own life, but today I'll share one from someone else you've heard of, the one and the only Oprah Winfrey.

She calls it one of her most embarrassing moments when film critic Gene Siskel asked her on live television, "What do you know for sure?" and she didn't have an answer. After that, Oprah did a lot of thinking about the things she knows for sure, and this is often a question she asks others.

Years ago, the question became a regular column in O Magazine. In 2007, her What I Know For Sure

column happened to be due on a day when it seemed like everything was falling apart. Her dog got sick to the point of near death, or so she thought at the time. She had to tape two shows back to back and she was scheduled to catch a flight to Africa that very afternoon. She was stressed, she was overwhelmed, and her column was late. In that article, she writes this: “There are two audiences full of people who’ve traveled from every corner of the United States for their first visit to the Oprah show. I have at least three emails from Gail and Amy Gross, O’s editor in chief saying my What I Know column is holding up the presses. I’m feeling a little stressed and I know nothing.”

Oprah knew she couldn’t cancel her day without letting a lot of people down. She couldn’t control the health of her sick dog. And no matter what she had, to catch a flight out of the country that afternoon. On that day, when she was forced to consider what she knew for sure, all she could come up with was this: “I know nothing.”

Even someone who’s done a lot of thinking about what they know for sure can forget it all in the middle of a hard time. Oprah’s day in many ways sounds familiar, but instead of catching a flight to Africa, we’re driving all the people to all the places for all the things. Instead of taping shows with Jerry Seinfeld in front of a live audience, we’re figuring out new school rhythms, piles of paperwork and how to be a person in the midst of all there is to do. Still, that feeling of panic and overwhelm is the same, especially when you’re hit with the unexpected.

If you found yourself next up in the line at Wendy’s with an inability to decide what to order, that could be a sign your soul is stuck in hustle again. When hustle has seeped into the level of my own soul... and by that, I simply mean that my thoughts and my emotions and my will feel rushed and hurried on the inside... it usually doesn’t take long to recognize if I know what to look for.

I pay attention to three signs in my own life. One is indecision. We’ve already talked about that one. But the second is distraction. For example, if I can’t follow my own train of thought, or if I find it difficult to listen when someone else is talking, if I’m reading something and I can’t read more than a paragraph at a time without looking around the room or getting up to make a list, that’s the second sign that hustle has taken over. And the third is a lack of inspiration. I’m particularly sensitive to this one because as a writer, inspiration feels important. Now to be clear, it’s maybe once a month that I write from a truly inspired place. Usually my writing is more of a discipline, a walk of faith from one word to the next, trusting that because God made me a writer, He will turn my tired words into something meaningful eventually. But when it comes to my life in general, I know hustle has taken over when I don’t feel inspired in anything, whether I’m in my kitchen, deciding what to wear, planning out my calendar, or having a conversation with John.

If I feel unable to see the lovely, if I notice that I’m only able to see the downside of everything, this is when I know that hustle and overwhelm have too loud of a voice. From an inability to choose my meal at a restaurant to prioritizing goals and vision for my work, when hustle takes over, sometimes it feels like I’m drowning in a sea of options, as if there are so many directions I could go and I don’t know which to pick. Other times, it feels like the opposite, like all my options have dried up completely, and any hope for moving forward is gone. Maybe you can relate to this distracted, gray, indecisive mindset. Maybe you’re feeling it too, the rush to produce, the pull to compete, the thoughts flying fast and furious, the mad sprint toward the finish line. I’ve got a secret for us both. That kind of race doesn’t actually have a finish line. When I notice these three signs of hustle hostage, indecision, distraction, and lack of inspiration, then it’s

time to reevaluate some things.

About four years ago, I discovered a simple tool I've fallen in love with, and it served as a grounding practice in my own life. And maybe it will help you too.

So it started several years ago back when I used to participate in the Write 31 Days challenge on my blog, where you take a topic and you write about it every day for 31 days straight. I was inspired by Oprah's column to write 31 days of what I know for sure. The only problem, when I sat down to write, I couldn't think of 31 things I knew for sure. I couldn't even think of a week's worth. But that question, what do you know for sure, is a good one to consider. It has intentionality built right into it. If you ask me what I know, I can chat on and on and list things out and run my big mouth. But if you ask me what I know for sure, I get quiet. The for sure bit forces thoughtfulness.

There was a time I knew for sure I would never allow a dog to live in my house. I knew for sure, I would never like onions, fish, or bell-bottom pants. All that changed. I know for sure God is good, but I don't always know how to interpret or discern His goodness on a daily basis. I know for sure John loves me, but I also know I can't control his love, manage his affection, or guarantee he won't change his mind. The things I knew for sure when I was 20 are different from the things I know for sure at 40. Clearly, not as much was for sure as I once thought. My idea to write about what I knew for sure slowly morphed into a different kind of project.

Instead of writing about what I knew for sure, I decided to keep a record of what I'm learning. This kind of list felt more friendly and accessible. So over the last four years or so, this regular practice of keeping track of what I'm learning has honestly become so much a part of my life that it's difficult to remember a time when I didn't do it. It keeps me present in my own life. It reminds me to pay attention. It serves as an anchor in the midst of overwhelm, confusion, or fog because while I may not be able to draw conclusions about what's happening in my life, I can at least record what I see, own it, and give it a name.

Maybe you are a season where what you thought you knew for sure is beginning to shift. Maybe shift is too gentle a word for where you are right now. Instead, maybe it feels more like a tsunami has washed all of your for sures completely out of your vocabulary. Or maybe you're just living your regular life today, much the same as you were yesterday. But a year from now, you know you don't want to forget who you are, where you are, and what you're learning. Wherever you are today, perhaps starting a simple list of what you're learning right now will be a grounding practice for you as well.

Now here's the fun part. Not only do I keep a seasonal list of what I'm learning, I invite my blog readers to do the same. And if you have a blog of your own, you can link up your list on my post that I post every quarter. My next list will go up Thursday, August 31st. And I'll share a portion of my own what I learned list, and then invite you to share what you've been learning. I'll share what I learned this summer and you can do the same, or you can share from whatever your previous season was depending on your hemisphere. Now, every time I invite people to share their what I learned list, inevitably, someone will say they keep meaning to join in but they can't think of one thing they've learned. The problem isn't that they aren't learning. Of course not. The problem is they aren't keeping track.

Personally, writing is how I know what I think about things, but tracking what I'm learning helps me understand who I'm becoming. Now, you don't have to be a writer to do this. You just have to know how

to keep a list. From the serious, the sacred, the silly, or the just plain useful, we decide to look back before we move forward. And quite frankly, doing it together makes it more fun. The practice of paying attention to what we're learning serves as an anchor for the soul in a fast-moving world. Instead of waiting for the world to stop so we can catch up, we slow ourselves, we look around, and name what we see as we go.

In the previous episode, episode three, I shared one way to avoid last-minute panicked pro-con list for your particular decisions by making the most important list, what I call the life energy list. You can learn more about that by listening to episode three, *The Most Important List*. Keeping track of what you're learning is done in the same spirit, but it's more of a daily or a weekly practice of paying attention as you go. Our lives are lived in our everyday moments, and this is the best way I've found to hold those moments, to learn what they have to teach, and to move forward with a lighter heart.

Record your disappointments, your joys, your questions, even if you don't have the answers. Write down your favorite TV show, the best book you read this month, and that moment in that movie that made you cry. Record that thing your kid said that made everyone laugh out loud.

Some of these things are more serious or more important than others, but keeping them all in one list helps to remind me how life has many colors and depths, and I do best when I'm willing to hold them all together, the sacred and the silly alike.

I found the sweet spot for me is to keep about 90 days in one spot before starting a new list. So I follow the seasons with mine, recording what I learned this summer, and then I'll do fall, winter, and spring. I don't write something down every day. Sometimes I'll go weeks without writing something down. But fairly regularly, I'll do a little reflection, or as something comes to mind, I'll jot it down. I've noticed in doing this over the years that the more serious things I'm learning tend to actually go along with the seasons. Themes of waiting and listening in the dark tend to rise to the surface during Advent. Themes of growth and new life emerge in spring. The three-month span of time has become one of my favorite ways to plan, and in turn, my new favorite way to record what I'm learning.

And so if you're feeling overwhelmed with indecision, distraction, or lack of inspiration, here's a simple prayer you might want to whisper along with me.

Father, remind us that our souls aren't made for hurry, but to find their rest in You. Teach us the sound of Your voice so that we can move to the unforced rhythms of grace. Reveal to us our own assignment and empower us to do our own thing well. Give us the courage to define our own margins, to be people with a strong no and a thoughtful yes. Slow us down in Your presence. We pray.

Thanks for listening to episode four of *The Next Right Thing*.

Today, I'm excited to offer you a free gift. Visit thenextrightthingpodcast.com and click on this episode where you can download a collection of printable seasonal list to help you keep track of what you're learning. We have them in both 5 by 7 and 8 by 11 printable seasonal less for both the Northern and the Southern hemispheres. Visit thenextrightthingpodcast.com to download your free seasonal list as well as a transcript of this episode and other resources that might be helpful, including all the details on how I track

what I'm learning as well as my favorite tools that I use in the process. You can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman and at emilypfreeman.com.

As you consider what your next right thing might be today, I'll leave you with a few words from my own book simply to say. As citizens of an invisible kingdom, we refuse to take our living cues from the world that says to build, grow, measure, and rush to keep up. Instead, we take our cues from the new hope alive within us, from the life of Christ who has made our hearts His home. We'll stop trying to keep up with the fast-moving world. And instead, we'll settle down and keep company with the small moments of our lives. We'll pay attention to them, listen to what they have to teach us, not rushed by them as if they are unimportant. We know better than that by now. We know the ways these small moments link arms with one another to form the timelines of our lives. We can't afford to miss them.