



## 101: Read Your Own Headlines

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 101.

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 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. In the midst of what might be a busy schedule, a life transition, a big decision, or the constant demands of everyday life, it can be easy to lose the thread of the story our lives are telling. That may not seem like it matters until it does, and that's what today's episode is all about. Listen in.

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So my USA Today app isn't working anymore. I've updated my phone and I've done all the things, but every time I try to get it back and open it, it just takes me in circles of password requests and then permissions until I just give up. But I haven't deleted it yet, and as a result, I keep on clicking on it and then the cycle continues.

P.S. You're about to learn a lot of useless information about me.

So The USA Today, well, that isn't my only source of news and I know I could just look at other apps or podcasts, but listen, I've been drawn to USA Today ever since I was a kid and we would stay in hotels where they would put the USA Today at the door, the newspaper. You know when you walk out

of your hotel room and there it is? This newspaper was in color.

They even color code the different sections, what I have now learned are called the sub-brand logo – green for money, red for sports, purple for life, light blue for travel, and orange for tech. Every time I see the USA Today logo, it conjures up memories of hotel pools and continental breakfast and early mornings on the road. And listen, we didn't even travel that much when I was younger, so I can't fully explain these associations, but I also can't deny them, so there you go.

All that to say, my affinity for the USA Today app is not rooted in some kind of grown-up decision to choose the best source of news, but in a nostalgic memory of familiarity. If we're honest, I think a lot of us make decisions based on feel and memory more than facts and logic, but I digress. That's just my opinion. It's not statistically proven, but maybe it is and I'll find those stats. If I do, I'll give them to you.

But back when the app was functional on my phone, every morning I would open the app and scroll through just the headlines, first in the news section and then in the life section. I wouldn't always click on the stories, but as it turns out, you can learn a lot just from the headlines.

That's the visual to carry with you for the rest of this episode. A well-written headline can tell you a lot both for the world around us and for the world within us. Of course, I'm going to go there because there are important headlines that will never show up in your newsfeed. They won't get any air time on the evening news or push a notification to your phone. These are the headlines that broadcast what's happening in the invisible world that lives inside our bodies, the inner world of the soul.

This inner world needs our attention, but it won't shout to compete with the pace of the world. Usually it only whispers. It doesn't respond to programs, agendas, or to hustle. To hear the headlines of the soul, we have to take a little time on purpose to consider what's going on in the invisible places within us.

When we ignore the headlines of our lives, how can we possibly understand the full story our life is telling? Frederick Buechner in his book *Whistling in the Dark* says this.

*“There’s also of course, the news that rarely if ever, gets into the media at all, and that is the news of each particular one of us. That is the news we’re so busy making that we seldom get around to sitting down and thinking it over. If it takes some extraordinary turn, we might. But the unextraordinary commonplace events of each day as they come along, we tend to let slip by almost unnoticed. That is, to put it mildly, a pity. What we’re letting slip by unnoticed are the only lives on this planet we’re presumably ever going to get.”*

Well said, Frederick.

Well, what might it look like, then, to read our own headlines? Well, for me it looks like this.

Number one, engage in an activity for the single purpose of disengaging from productivity. When I feel the pressure of the fast moving world, I choose to do something that is the opposite of whatever I have been doing. For me, a lot of times I’m sitting in front of a computer, so the opposite of that is to go outside and take a walk or to read a book with actual real pages that you can turn. Maybe even to try something new.

In so many areas of life, I’m working hard to produce and, if I’m honest, to succeed, so I really like the idea of taking some time to make nothing at all except maybe to create some space for my soul to breathe. The soul responds to space, to silence, and to Jesus. Take some time to listen and you might be surprised what you have to say.

A second way to begin to listen to the headlines of our own lives, admit what you really want. I’ve said this a lot before and I do not plan to stop saying it anytime soon. What you want is what you want whether you admit it or not.

Your desire is an important headline to know because what you want will shape your next right thing for better or for worse, so knowing and naming what you want in the presence of God is actually a gift because you can either move forward towards it in love or you can let it go with both eyes open. But denying desire to avoid seeming selfish or grabby, that’s a false humility and it has to stop. Because like I said, what you want is what you want whether you admit it or not. Knowing what you want is not the same thing as getting what you want or demanding what you want.

Desire is a gift when we open it in the presence of God. What happens as a result of that? That's not my business, but knowing it, confessing it, admitting it? That's an important part of paying attention to my own life.

Finally, another simple way to read my own headline is number three, one of my favorite ways, keep a list. Lists are a tool we use so we don't forget things. We make grocery lists so we don't forget bananas, and we make to-do lists so we don't forget to take the dog to the vet or sign the permission slip, but lists can be good for other kinds of things, too, namely the things going on in us beneath the surface.

A few lists I keep that helped me read my own headlines and pay attention to the story my life is telling. P.S., I've explained and shared these lists before. This is nothing new, but I'll remind you here.

Number one, I keep a gratitude list Ann Voskamp style. I have a notebook dedicated to things I'm thankful for. I started with one and now I'm on 541 and growing. Perusing that list reminds me of the gifts of my life.

A second list I keep is a list of things I'm learning organized by month. I talk more about this way back in episode four and I'm sure in some other episodes as well, but basically every month I keep track of what I learned, from the serious things of the soul to interesting pop culture facts and to fun life hacks that make life easier. It all counts.

Finally, I talked about this one in episode 92 and I've written about it in several of my books, but it continues to be a lifeline when the days rush by, and that is I keep a list that I call, "These are the days of."

I sit down for five minutes and make a simple list with "These are the days of" at the top, and then I bullet point what's happening in my right now life. The shows we're watching, the events we've attended as a family, our current favorite meal, the stuff that life is made up of.

Now, these simple things that show up on all of these lists, they wouldn't make headlines in the world, but they certainly make up the stories of my life. And that's why they're important to remember. Maybe it seems too self-absorbed to pay so much attention to the things your life is made up of, and of course,

there's always that danger to be so introspective that we lose touch with the people and the world around us. But in my experience, I've discovered the other side to be equally as dangerous, and that's the part that we're talking about today. Losing touch with myself and the life of God within me.

When I forget to pay attention to the story my life is actually telling, decisions feel foggy, desire seems lost, and my next move is based on a knee jerk reaction rather than a grounded response. When I forget to read my own headlines, I'm in danger of losing the plot. What about you?

What's on your calendar this week? What appointments do you dread and which ones bring you joy?

What's on the menu in your kitchen?

Who is the first person you'll call if you need a prayer or a listening ear?

Are you full of energy and optimism today or are you exhausted and you can't name why?

Are you taking your vitamins? Reading good fiction? Planning a date night? Getting some sleep?

There's no wrong answer here, and the goal is not to correct yourself. It's just to pay attention. This is your life and these are the headlines that describe it.

My prayer is that you will continue to discover how Christ is with you in every ordinary moment, both the ones where you feel capable and the ones where you're out of your element. Both in the visible world you can see and the invisible one that lives within you. Here's to remembering to listen to your life as you do your next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 101 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple habit of reading your own headlines can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives. If you know someone who could benefit from these episodes

but they aren't podcast listeners, remember we provide transcripts for every episode available at [thenextrightthingpodcast.com](http://thenextrightthingpodcast.com). Just click on the episode you want and then scroll down to the green button that says download transcript. As always, you can find me at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) or on Instagram @emilypfreeman.

And now in closing, a few more words from that book I mentioned before, *Whistling in the Dark*.

*“We are all of us caught up in our own small wars, both hot and cold. We have our crimes and passions, our failures and successes. We make our occasional breakthroughs. God knows we're searching for peace. It's all apt to happen so quietly and on so small a scale, we hardly realize it's happening. Maybe there's nothing on earth more important for us to do than to sit down every evening or so and think it over. Try to figure it out if we can. At least try to come to terms with it. The news of our day, where it's taking us, where it's taking the people we love, it is, if nothing else, a way of saying our prayers.”*

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