



### **133: Learn The Art of Asking Questions**

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 133.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but also it's 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.

If you're listening to this in real time, first of all, hi, hello, happy end of June. For the last six years, I've been sending a monthly email to my readers on the last day of the month. And in that letter, I always share at least three things. I share what books I'm reading, I share something I'm learning, and for the last year or so, every month I also share questions for reflection to help you think about the last 30 days and consider the ones to come.

By the way, if you want to receive my end of month letters, you can visit [emilypfreeman.com/letter](http://emilypfreeman.com/letter) and sign up there. And I'll be sure to send you the next one coming out. But as we are now halfway through this year, it seemed fitting to do a bit of reflection before moving forward. Listen in.

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You've probably heard me say some version of this John Dewey quote before, that "we do not learn from an experience, we learn from reflecting on an experience."

It may sound strange at first, but I have found these words to ring true in my own life. There are many ways to reflect on our experience, but one of the most helpful ways for me is through answering questions.

When we're young, asking questions comes naturally. We ask because we genuinely didn't know things. Where do babies come from? Why doesn't dad eat cake? How long would it take to get to the moon? Do I have enough change for the ice cream truck? Why can't humans fly?

I'm just realizing my example questions have much to do with flying and also snack food. Okay. Moving on.

Curious questions are part of learning, but as we grow, so do our question asking habit. Rather than asking out of curiosity or simply for information, we can learn to ask questions in love.

In her forward to Seth Haynes compelling *The Book of Waking Up*, Shauna Nyquist wrote a few lines that have stayed with me since I read them back in January, she said, and I'm quoting her, "In this midlife change-riddled, loss-heavy season of my life, I'm getting pretty comfortable with walking alone, largely because I find those too bright and too happy voices so much more offensive than silence to my ears these days. But God has in his goodness sent a few voices my way, voices saturated with honesty, tangled with pain, singing low tones that keep me good company along the way."

Again, that was part of her forward to Seth Haynes' book. So she was talking about how his voice was one keeping her good company during those days when she wrote it. But she put into words, something I think a lot of us long for, and that is to have people in our lives who will not try to come up with answers to our many problems or worse, try to roll them in sugar or solve them by sundown. Instead, we long for people who will sit beside us in a silence, who will carry our complex questions, and maybe when the time is right, ask us some more. Not for the sake of telling us something they think we ought to know disguised with a question mark and not in a nosy or even a purely curious way. But to genuinely ask a question for the sake of love.

One way to know you've truly grown in the art of asking questions in relationships is when you don't have to actually know the answer, because the answer isn't for you as the asker, it's for the person to whom you're asking the question.

Now you may not have people in your life right now who have learned the art of asking questions. So with that in mind, and in the spirit of my end of month letter, I wanted to take this opportunity to ask you a few questions to carry and to consider.

Why is this so important?

We are still very much in a collective season of grief and mourning from discovering how deep the roots of systemic racism go in this country to the loss of our daily rhythms to the low-grade anxiety that visits us every time we put on a mask at Target to the ways we start so many sentences with plans that we had made for this year, and then we end them with, "But that was before the pandemic." While this communal grief is a common measure beneath our days, our individual lives continue to tell personal narratives of heartbreak as well.

Dear friends have died and there's been no funeral. Milestones have passed, and they've gone by uncelebrated and unacknowledged. Income streams have dried up with no assurance that that will change. We're challenged to grieve without gathering, to mark milestones without the usual fanfare, and to come up with creative solutions to problems we've not had before. Years from now, hindsight will literally be 2020, but for now, we're in the middle of it. And we can't see far ahead. The only way out is through.

That's why reflection is actually so important. We can't see what's coming, but we can name what has already been. We don't have to wait to find people who have learned the art of asking questions. We can learn to ask ourselves the questions and then dare to tell ourselves the truth in the presence of a loving God.

Looking back over the letters I've sent to my readers over the past year, I've pulled out some of my

favorite questions so far for you to consider for yourself. May these questions be, for you, the low tones that keep you good company along the way.

**Question #1**

In the past 30 days, what was your most life-giving yes? This may not be the “yes” that yielded the best results, got the biggest win, or led to the most accolades. But what is something you said yes to that felt like life? Name it.

**Question #2**

In the past 30 days, what was your most life-giving no? It may not have been a “no” that was easy to make, and you may have had to struggle to get the word out. Sometimes the simplest answer is the hardest to give, but you said no. And it opened the way for you. What was that life-giving no?

**Question #3**

Name something you’re reconsidering. As a result of the last 30 days, maybe you’ve reconsidered a long-held belief, a biased worldview, an unhealthy relationship, or the way you’ve allowed grief, anger, or fear to build up in your body. You may not have answers or resolutions, but reconsideration done in the presence of God is an important part of our becoming.

**Question #4**

What was the funniest thing that happened last month? Don’t skip this one. Think about it fully. rRview your days without hurry and consider a time when you were caught off guard, where the heaviness was replaced with levity, where the spark of joy met you in the moment and sent your head back with laughter. Your smile does not betray your heavy heart. You are human, and you have the capacity to carry both grief and joy.

**Question #5**

What will peace look like next month? One thing we can count on is that time will move us along, but how? What will it look like to carry the peace that passes all understanding with us into the next 30 days?

As you learn the art of asking questions, may you hold onto the sure fact that your friend Jesus, who is the Prince of Peace wants to meet you in every ordinary moment as you simply do your next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 133 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of learning the art of asking questions can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because while it’s true this is a podcast about making decisions, the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

As always. You can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman and online at emilypfreeman.com, where we always provide a transcript for every episode, either for you if you prefer reading and for our deaf and hard of hearing friends who would otherwise not have access to an audio offering.

Once again, if you'd like to get these monthly letters delivered to your inbox with at least three reflection questions that I include in every letter, along with books, I'm reading and things that I'm learning, you can sign up to receive that letter [emilypfreeman.com/letter](http://emilypfreeman.com/letter). Just know if you don't sign up before the last day of the month, then you'll get the letter that comes out at the end of the following month. So just keep that in mind. Again, that's at [emilypfreeman.com/letter](http://emilypfreeman.com/letter).

Well, I'm going to close with a lyric from a song by Ellie Holcomb. And every time I hear this lyric in her song, that's called With You Now, I tear up because it's such a strong lyric and it's such a beautiful picture of how it feels when someone walks with you in the midst of a difficult situation.

Here's the lyric from Ellie's song called With You Now:

When the sunlight's missing your face and you're not sure how long these winds will blow, I'll be with you now. When you sing your sad songs, I will learn the words and sing along when you're in the valley, we will find the river running through I'll hold on to you.

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