



144: When You're Feeling Stuck: Start With Your Senses

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 144.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but also about making a life. If you struggle with decision fatigue or chronic hesitation, or maybe you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information and the sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment while you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer and a simple next right step.

Since we're in the middle of a mini-series about experiencing the world through our senses, I thought I might share a few classes from this episode, sponsor Skillshare. These classes can help you notice your surroundings and spark your creativity at the same time. Skillshare's online community offers thousands of classes for the creative and the curious. One particular class that caught my eye is Emily Gauld's Creative Writing for All: A 10 Day Journaling Challenge. And listen, you guys know how much I love our writing challenge.

Her class may be the perfect opportunity for you to take a few moments to process what's going on in your world right now. Or maybe you want to create a little bit more margin in your day. So you could try Productivity Masterclass by Ali Abdal, featuring principles and tools to boost your creativity.

Well, right now, Next Right Thing listeners can get two months free of premium membership at [skillshare.com/nextrightthing](https://www.skillshare.com/nextrightthing). That's two full months of unlimited access to classes like Emily's and Ali's for free just for being here with me, go to [skillshare.com/nextrightthing](https://www.skillshare.com/nextrightthing) to claim your offer or tap the link in today's show notes.

Now on today's episode, where I'm glad to continue the series about paying attention to our five senses and doing that as we make decisions, which can be particularly helpful when we're feeling stuck. And we don't know what to do next. Listen in.

Because of my work around decision making and discernment, people ask me quite often questions about clarity and certainty. The questions almost always begin with some version of the phrase, "How do I know when it's the right time to..." or something like, "How can I know for sure if I should...". Whatever the thing is, questions of timing, next steps, and which path to take can consume our thoughts, causing us to be distracted, to lose sleep, or to make a decision in haste, just to have it behind us. That's because

unmade decisions hold power. They pull in, they push, they can interrupt our rhythms and they poke us awake at night. They can turn us into strange versions of ourselves that we don't fully recognize like toddlers at our feet while we're making dinner. The decision that we have to make, it's going to follow us around wherever we go refusing to leave us alone until we face it head on and either pick it up or point it in the right direction.

Unmade decisions demand our attention, but that is often where we get stuck. We can become so focused looking at our unmade decisions in the face that we can often forget the context around them. Maybe our hyper-focus has us stuck, and we don't even realize we've adopted a false sense of urgency about this decision. Or maybe we've become stuck because we don't know the best next right thing and we're not sure how to find out questions. Like how can I know when it's the right time? Or how can I know if I should? Well, these types of questions presuppose that there is one answer, some kind of certain path for knowing if we're about to royally mess everything up, or if we're going to be okay. In my experience, that's kind of what we're all really looking for.

Am I safe? Am I secure? Are we going to be okay?

If you find yourself stuck in the decision-making process, it could help to reengage the world around you in ways that have nothing to do with the decision. Maybe it's time to get out of your head and into your body. I've got three ways to do that. Of course, I do. They all had to do with the five senses.

The first way I've talked about before is to take a walk instead of looking at your phone or listening to music, walk with empty hands. Now there's nothing wrong with walking with music or a podcast in your ears. I do it all the time, but maybe this time, if you're feeling stuck, it could be good to walk slow and pay attention to your senses, particularly your eyes and your ears. What do you hear as you walk? Listen to the world around you, rather than letting music or a podcast carry you somewhere else.

Let the rhythm of your feet on pavement or grass or gravel pound out a melody of peace. Let the neighborhood noises preach the sermon for once. Listen for what you can hear a distant car, a singing bird, a barking dog and airplane overhead, the rush of traffic. And then what do you see? Watch how the road of the sidewalk before you curves and cracks. See how the leaves and branches move in the wind. Pay attention to the people you pass, their faces behind their masks, the way they carry themselves. Look at your shoes, their color increases. Do you see any animals? Any signs of a changing season? Any neighbors you haven't met before? Give yourself the gift of being with what is. All the ordinary sounds and sights of your everyday space. All the things that happen, whether you're there to hear them or see them or not.

Number two, take a shower.

And this one, pay attention to smell and touch. There's a reason why your best ideas and solutions come while you're sweeping the floor, washing the dishes or taking a shower. I've read this whole article on Buffer. It's called Why We Have Our Best Ideas in the Shower: The Science of Creativity. I will not make you suffer through what is sure to be a clumsy retelling of the science. But of course, you can read the article if you want to, I'll link it in the show notes. You can learn all about the dopamine and the prefrontal cortex and all that kind of stuff. But when it comes to feeling stuck to wanting to move forward, but not knowing how or what's best, a warm shower could be just what you need in the article co-founder and COO of Buffer, Leo Wintrich poses the question, why is a relaxed state of mind so important for creative

insights when our minds are at ease? When those alpha waves are rippling through the brain, we're more likely to direct the spotlight of attention inward toward that stream of remote associations emanating from the right hemisphere. He goes on to write in contrast when we are diligently focused, our attention tends to be directed, outward toward the details of the problems that we're trying to solve while this pattern of attention is necessary.

When solving problems, analytically, it actually prevents us from detecting the connections that lead to insights. That's why so many insights happen during warm showers. For many people, it's the most relaxing part of the day. It's not until we're being massaged by warm water, unable to check our email that we're finally able to hear the quiet voices in the backs of our heads, telling us about the insight the answers have been there all along. We just weren't listening.

Again, that quote is from an article on Buffer called *Why We Have Our Best Ideas in the Shower: The Science of Creativity*, and you can read it in its entirety through a link in the show notes. But I just want to repeat that last part. The answers have been there all along. We just weren't listening. Notice what unlocked the answers. It wasn't by listening harder with our ears. Instead, it was by allowing the warm soothing water to hit the skin, the smell of rosemary and mint shampoo, the clean, calming sense of lavender or lemon, the steam on your face, the water on your back, the white noise of the water from the nozzle quieting whatever else is happening in other rooms of the house. That warm shower was the key to unlocking insights that are already within us. And the gift of taking a shower could be simply allowing those insights to rise to the surface.

One final way to get out of your head and into your body when you're feeling stuck, have a good meal, or at least a meal. I can't tell you how many times I'm working hard or I'm stuck in a decision, or I've just got my head down the computer and I work all the way through lunch forgetting to eat. And it's no wonder by 2 or 3 o'clock, my ability to make decisions is completely shot. This isn't the first time we've talked about the importance of taking care of our simple physical needs. In episode 115, it's called *Before You Decide, HALT*. The "H" and HALT stands for hungry. In summary, don't make decisions on an empty stomach. You can put that on a T-shirt.

In Luke 8, when Jesus brings a young girl back to life from death and everyone in the room stands there with their mouths, gaping open, perhaps they were ready to hear the grand and important plans that God might have for her young life. But that's not what happens. Jesus doesn't make things complicated or come up with a five-year plan for her life. Instead, he simply tells them to make her lunch, to give her something to eat. That was her next right thing. So we too are invited to eat, not just of the body of Christ, but of the bread and the butter and the heavy cream and the soup leftover from last night.

"What's becoming clearer and clearer to me," Shauna Nyquist writes in her book *Bread and Wine*, "is that the most sacred moments, the ones in which I feel God's presence most profoundly when I feel the goodness of the world, most arrestingly take place at the table."

It's true. What Jim Smith says that we are ones in whom Christ dwells and delights, and that we live in a strong and unshakable kingdom of God.

But when we persevering on wanting assurance that we are doing the exact right thing, and we want confirmation that now is the very right time and certainty that we are not missing any of the way. Well,

that is much like wanting to live in the kingdom without the presence of the King. We won't find certainty in a plan, but in a person. And that might be scary, except when we realized what was good for us last year might not be good for us now. What worked in parenting when they were 12 doesn't work when they're 16. What was right for our family last year may not quite be right anymore. And that doesn't mean we were wrong back then. It just means that things have changed. We have changed and that the Spirit is living and active within us breathing new life into cold, tired corners. Bringing fresh air where it had maybe become stale.

The work of discernment requires a daily connection with God. A moment-by-moment acknowledgment that God will let us know what we need to know when we need to know it if we ask. And one way God might often speak is not only through our thoughts and through God's word, but also through our bodies. So let's move them simply. Let's bathe them thoroughly. Let's feed them gently and let's honor the image of God that we all reflect as we continue to simply do our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 144 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of paying attention to your senses when you're feeling stuck 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. You know, the bigger truth is our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

One group of people who are particularly cautious, hesitant, and always wanting to know if we're on the right track are my dearly beloved writers. We're in our fifth year of leading thousands of writers to make progress toward their writing goals at Hope*Writers. And this is one of the three times a year when our doors are open to new members. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, I am one of the cofounders of Hope*Writers, which is an online membership community for writers who want to make progress in their writing goals.

If one of the questions you're carrying has to do with writing, if you wonder if maybe now's the time to begin to finally make progress towards your goals, whatever they are. I want to invite you to check out hope writers at hopewriters.com/join today. It doesn't matter if you're just getting started, or if you've been writing all your life, Hope*writers is the kindest place on the internet for writers to make progress and to learn what it means to begin to balance the art of writing with the business of publishing, no matter your doubts, questions or goals and the writing life, there is a path and the good news is you're already on it to find out what stage of writing you're currently in. You can take our 30-second free quiz at hopewriters.com/quiz and get immediate access to a simple tip to move you forward.

Now I mentioned if you've never heard of us, I told you a little bit about hope writers, but chances are, if you're listening and you're a writer, you've heard about hope writers for many years. If you've been on the fence for a while and have been watching from a distance, I just want to encourage you to come on over and join our community of writers. There's room for you at the writing table. And here's the thing we have a 60 day try and applied guarantee, which means that there's truly no risk. You try it, you apply it. It doesn't feel like the right fit for you. Then you can always email us and you can get a complete refund. All you have to do is go to hopewriters.com/join, because this is the time. And today is a day to learn more about how hope writers might be able to partner with you and help you reach your writing goals, no matter

what they are.

Well, in closing, here's a question for you to ask yourself, as you continue to pay attention to your five senses. Now I'm going to ask it here for you to think about, and then later this week for fun, I'll ask on Instagram to see what you have to say. Here's the question.

What does courage sound like?

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