



## 171: What to do When the World Opens Up

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 171.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but also 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.

Before we get started, I'd like to share a word about today's sponsor, KiwiCo. here in the United States, we just welcomed spring and that usually means longer afternoons in the yard, tidying up or cleaning our homes and anxiously waiting the promise of warmer days and summer sun. If you're planning on staying closer to home with your kids this spring, it may be the perfect time to explore the fun and creative steam projects from KiwiCo. KiwiCo brings exciting new discoveries to kids of all ages through its innovative and accessible art, science and geography projects delivered right to your door each month. My teenagers and I have worked our way through several maker crates by now with each one being as engaging and fun as the last. And we have our sights set on the macrame planter project, as it would be a perfect way to welcome spring.

It's hard to find new creative ways to keep our kids busy while stretching their brains no matter their age. KiwiCo does the heavy lifting for you so you can spend more quality time tackling projects together instead of scrambling to find things for them to do to fill their time. There's something for every kid or kid at heart each month. And right now you can get 30% off your first month plus free shipping on any crate line using the code `nextrightthing` at `kiwico.com`. That's 30% off your first month at `kiwico.com`, with the code, `nextrightthing`. Now onto today's episode.

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Doing the next right thing has been a lifeline for us in so many areas of our life: parenting, schooling, work, relationships and all manner of decision-making. Exactly one year ago this week, if you're not sick of people talking about this pandemical anniversary, I released an episode in a bit of a haze a year ago. I did the best I could to remain consistent here on The Next Right Thing Podcast. And I offered real feeble advice for what to do when the world shuts down. That was episode 120. Remember those early days navigating the rapidly changing situation in the world. Every company was sending out cancellation notices and how they were responding to this newly emerging, unpredictable, unpreventable virus. We were all trying to find our bearings and that episode was my attempt to continue to serve you, and if I'm honest, to remain grounded myself. It was my most downloaded episode in the last 12 months. Of course,

it was.

It's true, these days are quite different now than they were one year ago. And while it's true, every city, state and country are at right now, various degrees of opening up again, it is happening gradually and eventually it will happen wherever you are. And a similar question is buzzing around us. What do we do now? What I'm hearing and what I'm feeling myself is a narrative that goes something like this. It's spring in North America, there's hope with the distribution of a vaccine, a few things are returning to normal, if they haven't already, then why am I lacking motivation? Why do I feel so down? Why can't I finish things? Where's the hope I thought I would feel when things finally started to turn around?

That might not exactly describe your mindset or your particular situation, but I know for a lot of us, it does describe where we are. Well, we've moved forward together all this time and I want to continue to walk with you as you navigate your next right thing, right now for yourself, for your family, with your friends, and as many continue to uncover new question marks. While some of the systems and structures that we've come to rely on really needed to be questioned, re-evaluated or even torn all the way down, what is going to replace them? What remains and what needs to be rebuilt? And by the way, raise your hand if you have energy for that. Here's one thing I know. None of us have ever done this kind of re-entry before. And still, none of us really knows what we're doing. This is not a bad thing. It's just a true thing. And it's important to remember to show ourselves and one another, a lot of grace and above all to be kind.

Before you can do your next right thing, you have to clarify your current condition. Another way to say that, name your right now, before you try to do your next right thing. It's true, there might be a lot that we still don't know. It's good to name what we don't know, but focusing on what we don't know can often be the catalyst for decision fatigue, anxiety and spiraling. Rather than naming what we don't know, let's return to a practice we've done here before. It's a three step list-making rhythm to help you prepare to do your next right thing in love as the world begins to slowly open up again. So let's name what we do know. All of the things that are true. We'll do this in three simple movements. You might want to make a list.

First movement, let's name our beginnings. Here's some questions or statements that you might be asking or saying in areas where you are at beginning. You might be thinking, okay, what now? Or maybe even you're literally thinking, where do I start? Or perhaps you're struggling with self doubt or a lack of competence. Or it could be that you feel hopeful and fresh, you have a new perspective and you're saying I'm ready. All of these statements and questions could be a clue to a place where you're at a beginning. In what areas of life are you making these statements or asking these questions? That could be a sign. Maybe it would be helpful to think of this first movement in two parts. Both, what are my beginnings? And where am I a beginner? Are you relearning how to define friendship after so many months away from many of your friends? You're at a beginning. Are you starting a new job, beginning a new contract or a position that's challenging you in some difficult and maybe even exciting ways? You're at a beginning, you are a beginner again.

Has there been a transition in your relationship to a person or a community and now you're learning to navigate new connections that are unfamiliar? You're at a beginning. All beginnings, no matter what they are, hold elements of both joy and maybe heartbreak. Because when we enter a new beginning, we have generally also experienced some kind of ending that has layered emotions, and grief, and transition and letting go all wrapped up into it. And we'll get to endings in a minute. But for now, don't be afraid to be a beginner, be relentlessly kind to yourself.

Second movement. Where are you in the middle? For the middle parts of life, you're likely asking the question how much longer? Or when will this change? Or maybe it's things are as they are now and I like them this way. I don't want them to change. Maybe you're in the middle. It won't always be this way, but it is this way now and maybe even for some time. Maybe you're working on a project that's been going on for a while and you know there's an end coming, but it hasn't come yet. This is a middle for you. Are you doing the hard and important work of confronting your own bias, your own racial insensitivities or coming to terms with systems and structures you once never questioned, but now you see how they've done harm? You're in the middle.

Are you planting a garden, writing a story, maintaining a home, navigating a health issue, caring for an aging parent or child with special needs? You are in the middle. Name all the middles that are true in your life right now. Be specific. These are your plot points in the larger narrative of life, but they're not your whole life. They count, but they don't get to hijack the narrative.

Third movement. What is ending? There may be obvious signs you're at an ending like an upcoming graduation ceremony, the ending of a contract or a recent breakup or a divorce. But sometimes you're at an ending and you don't realize it until later. Take a moment and consider what is ending. How do you know if you're at an ending? Maybe you cry unexpectedly for seemingly no reason at all. Maybe you're starting to feel a burden lift ever so slightly. Take a moment to recognize the tears and the levity. If you're writing these down, your list may start with, I'm saying goodbye to, and then fill in the blanks. The ending of things might be particularly tender right now, especially here at the one year mark of this pandemic.

One year ago may have been the last time you drove your child to school, but you didn't know it would be the last time, but now your child, well, she's really not a child anymore. She got her driver's license during the pandemic and now those drives to school don't include you. Maybe you attended your church on a normal Sunday in early March of 2020, or your place of work, and you didn't know it at the time, but that was the last time. And you didn't know it would be the last time and it slipped by unacknowledged. Or maybe you had some clear endings this year that no one could gather to grieve or celebrate birthdays, funerals, weddings, or farewells. Maybe endings have quietly tapered off, invisible and uncelebrated. It's important that we name and acknowledge them, grieve them when appropriate, celebrate them too. So what is an ending in your life right now today? Take some time to name those endings. Don't let them slip by unseen, write them down, resist the urge to edit or censor. Just write the thing down without judgment.

Clarify your current condition. Name the places where you're beginning, middling and ending, and then allow others the space to do the same. It's not always possible, healthy or desirable to go back to how things were before in any situation. That might be good news or bad news depending, but it helps me to at least name what's the same and what's different by naming my beginnings, middles and endings. And I just want to say something that might go unnoticed, especially as things begin to "open up", whatever that means for you and your community, where you live, but that's that there are still things here at play that you've never had to process before. We cannot forget that. You're still doing a new thing in a weird day. None of this is normal. Resist the urge to try to do too much too soon. No need to rehaul all at once. In your beginnings, have hope. In your middles, persevere. In your endings, grieve or celebrate all the way out. It takes what it takes. In all of these things, I hope you find comfort and clarity in simply doing your next right thing in love.

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Thanks for listening to episode 171 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this invitation to name your beginnings, middles and endings as the world begins to open up. I hope that can just be 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. But the bigger truth is that our daily decisions are actually making our lives. If the principles you hear on this podcast are helpful for you, remember, you can read the ebook version of *The Next Right Thing* for free with an Amazon Prime account. You can visit the link in the show notes for information about that. Or if you just like that feeling of holding a book in your hands, it's always discounted at various online retailers so you can order the book online, wherever books are sold.

Now, if you haven't gotten a copy of *The Next Right Thing Guided Journal* yet, springtime could be a great excuse to start. You can begin at the beginning of any month and document the next 12 months of your life with simple lists and prompts provided. Reader, Tracy Roberts, sent me a kind word about what she loves most about the journal. She shared with me that even though she's journaled most of her adult life, she realized most of what she'd written in her past journals were filled with grief, and sadness and pain. If outside eyes read these journals, she wrote, "You'd think my marriage was awful, my kids were some kind of messed up and I was always miserable. I never journaled about the good stuff and the joys of my life." Tracy writes, "Thank you for designing a journal guide that explores more than the heartache. I don't feel the pressure to complete a daily activity. And I look forward to the journal more because of that. I like my life from the pages of this journal."

Tracy, I'm so glad that guided journal has helped you record the reality of your full life, both the struggles and the joys. I appreciate your willingness to let me share these words here on the podcast. Well enclosing, you can find me at [emilypfreeman.com](http://emilypfreeman.com) or on Instagram @emilypfreeman, where I continue to work hard to be super intentional about sharing this next right thing posture. As always, I'm glad you're here and I'll see you next time.