



## 183: Real Talk About Overfunctioning

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 183.

This is a podcast about making decisions, but it's 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, well, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, and a simple next right step.

But first, let's chat about today's sponsor, KiwiCo. We're a few days shy of the official first day of summer, and with my kids out of school and exploring new hobbies and interests, I found myself reflecting on my own childhood summers, like designing things with my sister, trying new recipes in the kitchen with my mom, and exploring my creativity through writing. Everything I loved about summer as a kid has a thread of curiosity running through it.

If you're looking for a way to encourage your kids' curiosity and keep them engaged in STEAM subjects, I highly recommend KiwiCo. I know the kid version of Emily would love the crates they have because adult Emily has scrolled through their Instagram on more than one occasion to find gift ideas and surprises for the kids in my life.

With eight different crate lines for all ages and interests, there's so much to choose from. The Doodle Crate is especially fun because it allows you to make things from scratch with materials and techniques you may be unfamiliar with. It's a fun way to boost creative competence for the whole family.

KiwiCo has made it easy to cultivate your child's natural curiosity and creativity, and right now, you can get your first month free on select crates at [kiwico.com/nextrightthing](http://kiwico.com/nextrightthing). With KiwiCo, there's something for every kid or kid at heart every month. Check out their crate lines at [kiwico.com/nextrightthing](http://kiwico.com/nextrightthing).

Now onto today's episode where I share a bit more personally than usual. Listen in.

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Two years ago, I took a sabbatical for about six weeks. It came on the heels of the busiest season of my adult life. I planned as much as I could for that six weeks sabbatical. Two of those weeks were some planned work and personal travel in London, and then the final four weeks, I was home, but I wasn't engaging in any of my work, including this podcast, and also including Instagram, email, hope\*writers, anything else that was work-related. I was essentially off the grid for four weeks.

In reality, it was not a good time to take off. We had just hired a few new people and I wasn't there to lead them or to help them along in their job very much. I mean, we had hired them in April and so I was there for a few months, but then I left for those six weeks. It was also a time when we were preparing for a conference and I wasn't there to provide a lot of direction or vision.

Now, nothing fully exploded or fell apart, but there were a lot of personal and professional things I had to face when I got back. In other words, it wasn't an ideal time for a break, but you know what else it wasn't an ideal time for? A breakdown. So I chose the break to prevent something worse.

Well, the week before I took that time off, I recorded an episode for this podcast, and last week, I listened to it. It dropped on June 25th, 2019. It's called Come Away For a While. Now, if you don't know me well, you may not be able to tell how exhausted I was from the sound of my voice, but I can hear it. And if you contrast that with the episode that comes directly after that, that dropped six weeks later, episode 89, Come Back With Peace, I sound rested, clear-headed and ready to work again.

The difference between the sound of my own voice has stayed with me and I'm paying attention. I saw an Instagram Reel from Onsite. If you don't know who they are or what they do, they offer retreats and workshops for emotional health, and you can find them at @onsiteworkshops on Instagram.

I haven't participated in any of their workshops or retreats, but I do follow them on Instagram. And on the reel, they contracted what we think depression looks like versus what it sometimes also looks like. We think it looks like crying, staying in bed and being alone, and sometimes it does look like those things. Maybe we would call that under-functioning, but it can also look like being busy, needing to perform, and detachment from self, what we might call overfunctioning. I'm not saying I'm depressed, but I am saying that reel also caught my eye.

For all the things that shut down, slowed down or stopped in 2020, here's what happened to my work life and maybe yours too. It got way busier, but that busy-ness was masked by the fact that I could manage it because my home life slowed down so significantly, but now it's June and other things are picking up and I no longer have the capacity I did before and the reality of my workload has now been revealed to me.

Emily P. Freeman:

I've been thinking a lot, and I mean a lot about my work and my rhythm of life lately. I know a lot of us have been. Anytime there's a transition from one season to the next, spring to summer or summer to fall, that's always a good time to evaluate schedules and equally important are rhythms. But especially now as the last year was one unlike any that we've lived through, the reflection for me anyway is taking longer and yielding fewer simple conclusions.

In my conversation with Megan Hyatt Miller a few weeks ago in episode 179, we talked about why it's important not to overwork, and I appreciated the concept of that conversation and the insight that Megan had to offer. One of my takeaways, in fact, was the importance of an evening shutdown routine, although we didn't really spend a whole lot of time talking about that, but that's one of my personal takeaways from that conversation in that episode.

Now, by evening shutdown routine, I mean anything that we do at the end of a work day on purpose that's a signal for us that it's time to stop working. So I've been practicing that to the extent that I've been able

to lately, and it's been mostly fine, but I'll be honest, even as I've started to implement that, I've been struggling to establish something that sticks and I haven't fully cracked the code as to why I've been struggling. In other words, the evening shutdown routine that I've practiced, even imperfectly, it's not really helping that much.

Now I'm a smart human. I know how to prioritize things. I am a grown-up. I don't work late into the night. I don't check my phone after a certain time. I'm not working at all hours. That's just not my life. Maybe at times it has been, but it's really not been, especially not lately. And then as I thought about it, I realized I don't think overworking is my problem. I think I'm overfunctioning.

You might be wondering what's the difference. I wonder that too. Well, I imagine they are related. Overworking can be an indicator of overfunctioning, but overfunctioning doesn't only apply to our work. It can also show up in our relationships, for example, being overly responsible for outcomes or over attentive to someone else's emotional wellbeing.

When I'm at my best, some of my super powers are that I can navigate complex emotions. I'm fairly comfortable with others in their grief. I'm curious, I'm creative, and I'm not afraid of being vulnerable with other people. But guess what's been happening lately? I'm frustrated by my own complex emotions. I'm avoiding others in my own grief. I lack curiosity. Curiosity overwhelms me and I'm struggling to be creative. I'm reluctant to be vulnerable with others.

The first temptation of Jesus was to turn stones into bread. Henri Nouwen has labeled that temptation the temptation to be relevant. If you want further reading on that and the other two temptations, I highly recommend Nouwen's book *In the Name of Jesus*, but I recently heard a description that resonates even more with me right now, and that was from MaryKate Morse. She's a professor of leadership and spiritual formation and also the dean of Portland Seminary, and she calls that first temptation of Jesus the temptation to over-function. She said this is a temptation to do more than God has called you to do. When you over-function, you don't have time to eat, to take care of your body or to connect. I have a choice to over-function or not.

Now it's true we can't always prevent seasons of busy-ness and even a short season of overfunctioning, but the question I'm carrying with me and I invite you to carry and to be honest about, is this a season or is this a pattern? Is this a moment or has it become a dysfunctional normal? As always, our next right thing starts with naming what is really going on.

Here are some signs that I am overfunctioning. And I'll be honest with you, I don't love sharing these, but I'm going to do it anyway because they might be signs for you too. I'll share them in no particular order. Let's jump right in.

First, sometimes I turn to my work when I'm pressured or stressed or sad because work feels like something I can control. Sometimes my knees hurt from sitting in front of my computer for too long. I clench my jaw. I tense to my shoulders. I'm quick to compare and despair. I hope you know what I'm talking about, compare and despair. If you do it, you know it. A little thing makes me big kind of mad. I'm overly attached to the emotional wellbeing of the people that I love. My to-do list starts out pretty large in the morning, and by the end of the day, it's larger. Meals and exercise are not super regular. I'm hesitant to reach out to friends because it's been so long since we've talked and there's so much to catch up on that I

just don't reach out at all.

I cry at the doctor's office when the nurse asks me a normal question like a this shouldn't make you cry kind of question, but you get teary anyway because somebody is asking how you are, even though it's on their chart and it's their literal job to do so. I keep making lists and then I lose the list. Things I love drop off the list first, like reading fiction, walking around the block. I put things where they don't go, for example, socks in the toilet. It's fine. We'll talk about it later. I have difficulty reading, focusing for more than short periods at a time. I feel a low grade discouragement and I can't exactly tell myself why.

I feel behind a lot. I can't access creative solutions. And let me tell you that last one is one of the most frustrating for me because one of my strengths is being able to access creative solutions.

So what is our next right thing if we're overfunctioning? Well, I'm not a therapist, but I do pay a therapist and I do know what helps buy me some time, and it's four questions. I'm going to share those four questions with you.

Number one is what has to continue? What can I not take off the calendar? What is something that I'm not going to be able to take a break from or pause or modify very much?

Number two, the second question, after you name what has to continue, what are the rocks that have to stay in the jar, but secondly, what can I pause? There are some things that can be paused that in regular time I would keep going with.

A third question, what will I say no to? And that's in terms of anything that comes up in the next, I don't know, four to six weeks. Are there things that you can say no to? Are there quote, unquote opportunities that might come your way that you already know, you're going to pre-decide and give your future self a gift and decide now that you're not going to add anything to the calendar. That's something that I'm paying attention to. I want to pre say no to as much as possible.

And the fourth question, and this might be the most difficult for some of us is where can I ask for help? It might be emotionally, spiritually, physically, relationally, so many ways where we need help, and identifying those areas where I can bring someone on board to help me. It might be an area where I'm naturally skilled or gifted at. It might be an area that's super stressing me out because I'm not naturally skilled or gifted at, but it is on my plate and something I have to do.

Sometimes the reason why we get into a state of overfunctioning in the first place, at least for me, is because I'm pretty self-sufficient and self-reliant and I'm capable and I can do things. And I like working by myself, but that can lead from enjoying working by myself to thinking that I have to work by myself, and then it can lead to overwhelm and discouragement.

So what has to continue? What can I pause? What will I say no to, and where can I ask for help? Paying attention to what is essential, where can I find rest, what is preventative, and where's my community?

Now notice one of the questions was not what can you quit? And part of this is because I know myself. And if I ask that question, especially when I'm in a state of overwhelm, the tendency will be to quit all the things that I don't actually want to quit. I just need a break. If possible, don't quit, cut cords or make

irreversible decisions when you're in an overfunctioning cycle. Give a pause before the conclusion.

Well, I confess to you right now I don't have a bow on this one, I guess I don't usually have a bow on these episodes, do I? But I'm glad to bring you along in my processing. It's been difficult for me to do that lately, I'll be honest. I tend to admire the people who can just bring the people along in all of their processing all the time, but that's not my way and I tend to have to work really hard to be spontaneous, and that kind of cancels itself out.

So in a non-bow summary, I will say this. First, I have two episodes left this month, and then I'm going to take a short one-month break from the podcast. I'll be back next week and the week after that, but after that, I'm going to create some space for myself so that I can be better equipped to create space for you. I don't always have that luxury, but in July, I will, so I'm going to take it.

But secondly, I wonder if you'll be honest along with me about your own life and rhythms. Are you in a season of overfunctioning or has it become a way of life? What can you pause? What can you say no to? Where can you ask for help? What is your next right thing? And then, what is your next next right thing?

So here's to us as we figure out together what it means to be our own friend, to believe that God really is with us and God's kingdom is strong and unshakable without our help or permission. Thanks be to God.

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Thanks for listening to episode 183 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of naming how you might be overfunctioning 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 our daily decisions are actually making our lives.

As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman and online at emilypfreeman.com. A lot of the daily and weekly conversation happens on Instagram. If we aren't friends there yet, I hope you find me @emilypfreeman. It's where we often take the topic of the podcast episode that week and expand it in conversation, photos, videos, and more.

Well, as I mentioned already, we've got two more episodes to go before a brief break, so I'll see you here next episode with a special guest. Stay tuned.

Well, in closing, I wanted to read to you a portion of *A Blessing of Your Work* from the late poet John O'Donohue. May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those who work with you and to those who see and receive your work. May your work never weary you. May it release within you wellsprings of refreshment, inspiration and excitement. May you be present in what you do. May you never become lost in the bland absences. May the day never burden you. May dawn find you awake and alert, approaching your new day with dreams, possibilities, and promises. May evening find you gracious and fulfilled. May you go into the night blessed, sheltered and protected.

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