



198: Be Present Not Perfect with Shauna Niequist

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 198. 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 is sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment, well, you're in the right place for a thoughtful story, a little prayer, a simple next right step, and sometimes a conversation.

Today I'm joined by a writer who deeply understands what it means to live life on autopilot chugging through the day on in her words, fear and caffeine, as it turns out that life is a train to nowhere and Shauna Niequist decided to get off. Today I'm happy to sit down with her to talk about writing, connection, and her next right thing. Listen in.

Emily:

Shauna, I would love to start off our conversation by something that I heard you say at a conference once, because you put something into words for me that I already knew, but had not yet articulated. You said, "You can connect or you can compare, but you can do both." And I would love for you to elaborate on that statement for us as we get started.

Shauna Niequist:

I love that you remember that. I think for me, where that came from was the awareness within myself that you could interact with a person and you could be essentially consumed with yourself, measuring yourself against this person, assessing your body or your intelligence or your professional success or your parenting or whatever, but it's a very inward focused way of being. You're physically with that person, you're maybe even looking in the eye, you're talking with them, but what you know is that your interior world is consumed by measuring yourself against that person. And when you are consumed with that, it's impossible to reach across into the heart and spirit and connecting place of another person. You're totally in your own thing.

Shauna Niequist:

Or the alternative is you can say, it may be that the math on my end is not going to be great. It may be that I don't measure up to this individual in any number of ways, but I have the gift of being present with them. So I'm going to listen and I'm going to learn, and I'm going to offer them kindness and wisdom and warmth. And to me, they can look similar on the outside, but they're fundamentally different ways of being with another human from the inside out. Does that make sense?

Emily:

It makes perfect sense. And I've tried to do both and you are exactly right. It does not work. It reminds me of something. I think I heard Leean Tankersley say one time about yoga. And she said that when she's feeling anxious, she often does a balancing pose like a tree pose or something where she's on one foot, because she's learned from people who know things that it's really difficult to both be anxious and keep your balance at the same time because you have to focus so much on the balance. And I have found that also to be true.

Shauna Niequist:

I totally connect with that. And I think so much of life is choosing what we're going to put our focus on, right? It could look the same to everyone else, but we know on the inside, if we're focusing heavily on balance or on anxiety, or heavily on competition or connection and it changes everything from the inside out.

Emily:

So speaking of that, thinking about what we're going to put our attention into, I am a firm believer that anything can be a spiritual practice if we are aware of the presence of God with us as we engage with it. And so when I think about that, it could be anything from washing the dishes to wearing a better pair of pants and honoring our bodies in that way. And I'm curious, Shauna, do you have what you might call unconventional spiritual practices that you engage that might not show up on a traditional list of spiritually formative practice?

Shauna Niequist:

Well, I agree with you just a 1000%. I believe that so much of being a spiritual person or having a spiritual practice is so much more about the awareness of presence than it is about the things we do or don't do, almost anything can be done in a spiritually present connected way. But the first couple that come to mind that might be considered a little bit unconventional are cooking, walking, dancing, and snuggling. And when I think about my life, when I think about trying to live in tune with the deeper spiritual side of life, I'm always drawn to the kitchen. I think some of it too is, I think some of our most effective spiritual practices happen when we're using our hands and our senses and our minds can settle and wander and reconnect with our hearts and reconnect with our bodies.

Shauna Niequist:

So it's almost like a magnet, like when things feel really off in my life especially I feel really stuck in my brain or if I'm having a writing problem that I can't unravel, the kitchen draws me like a magical magnet and I get out the cutting board and the knife. And a lot of times I don't even know what I'm going to do. One of my favorite cookbook writers tells about a friend who told her, "Walk into the kitchen, grab a cutting board and a knife and start with an onion and everything opens from there." You can do basically anything in the world if you have an onion in your house. And so lots of times the magnet of the kitchen pulls me in, cutting board, knife, onion. And by the time I get through chopping the onion, I know a little bit where I want to go in the kitchen and the meal that I'm making, but also in that like my body and my spirit and my awareness start to reconnect a little bit.

Shauna Niequist:

So cooking is a major part of it for me. It's physical. It's sense oriented. It gets you back into the tactile,

natural, colorful world. It's always really healing for me. It reminds me how much even cooking a meal for someone you love is participating with God as he provides for us. He's the one that is helping things to grow in fields and helping things that will nourish our bodies and then we play just like a tiny little part in that by getting them from the store to the house, from the kitchen to the table. And so I think it's sacred work and it's also good creative work. Also, I'm a walker, I am categorically... I would say I have a complicated relationship to fitness in a lot of ways. And I have a lot of no-go's.

Shauna Niequist:

I do not want to be yelled at ever, even in an inspirational way, I will walk out of that room. I don't like being made to be hot for no reason. That doesn't work for me. I don't like it when they lock the doors in a... None of that. I don't want it to be pitch black, got a lot of stuff that I don't want to do. If I can help it, I never want to on a treadmill again ever in my life. That feels like one of our worst inventions like, we have outside, right? But instead we made the outside on the inside. It doesn't work for me.

Shauna Niequist:

All that to say, though, I love to walk. I walk when I'm happy. I walk when I'm sad, I walk by myself. I walk with my best girlfriend. I walk with my husband. And I walk down on the river. I walk through different parts of the city and my therapist told me, I was going through this profoundly painful time. And he said, we're going to do a lot of work in this office, you and I, working it out. But he said, "You have to know the grief that you're experiencing, grief is somatic meaning it lives in our bodies, not just in our thoughts or our emotions." And he said, "You're going to have to walk this out. You're going to have to bodily release this step by step." And so I always think of that. And some of the most profoundly spiritually connected times in my life are when I'm walking and I can feel myself in tune with my body and my spirit, all working together step by step and my breath and my awareness of what's around me and seeing things that are beautiful or seeing things that are challenging.

Shauna Niequist:

And so walking is a key for me. One of the most healing practices in my life. And then dancing is at the top of my mind because it is currently a Monday morning. And one of my dearest friends got married on Saturday night and we danced the absolute night away. It was the first wedding I've been to since like pandemic times and very strict protocols that I felt very good about and everyone was vaccinated. It was very safe. And there was a sense of delight and freedom and joy. And I think one of the challenges of this last season is we've been so isolated and disconnected from bodies and touching and playing. And there's been so much like TV watching and sitting. And this just felt like the best workout I've had in months and months and months. And my feet hurt so bad the next day and we were all a mess. It was really hot and the doors were open and we were all sweaty and terrible, but there was sense of, this is what bodies are made for. This is why there's music, it was just great.

Shauna Niequist:

And then the last thing I said was snuggling, especially we have two boys and our little guy is just a snuggle bug. And one of the ways that I can... When he is in need in some way, he's over tired or he's nervous or something, he needs me in a real bodily physical way. And I'm able to hold him and be next to him and soothe something in him that has come undone, and that feels like very holy work. It feels like I can feel his anxiety flowing out. And that feels to me a lot how God is with us, holding us still and tight with a sense of presence until the anxiety can start to flow out. And so that makes me feel connected to the spiritual presence, the divine presence in the world, because, again, it feels like a little bit of a way to

participate in that. Does that make sense?

Emily:

That makes such beautiful sense. And I love that word participation. This feels like a theme. I don't know about you, Shauna. I feel like it's a theme coming up in the people I'm paying attention to, the writers that I'm reading and following on social media and all the things is this idea of bringing some of these practices from our head into our bodies and how important that is. I've also heard you say, speaking of this one maybe is on the line of conventional unconventional, but I've heard you say that writing maybe specifically journaling is one of your core, lifelong spiritual and mental health practices.

Emily:

And I'm curious to hear from you, as you look back on that, because I feel the same way. How do I know what I think about a thing unless I write it down? I do not. I know nothing, but was there ever a time... First of all, when you felt like maybe writing didn't count in some way, or was there a time when you realized for sure, like, oh, yes, this is vital. This is not just a little hobby I'm doing as a 13 year old, but this is a vital practice for me as a human person in the world.

Shauna Niequist:

That's an interesting question. I feel like I have questioned almost everything about everything over the last several years and throughout growing up, I tend to be a person who wonders a lot. And I honestly don't know if I have ever questioned the central role that writing has in my life. It's one of the only unshakeable through lines. I would say writing and reading and feeding people and my connection to water. And those are at the core of everything, I might change in a million ways. There might be a million seasons still to come. I'm pretty sure those are the pillars on which my way of being in the world is built upon. And that has nothing to do with publication or sharing one's work. I will live as a writer until the day I die, because I feel just exactly the same way you do.

Shauna Niequist:

I have no idea what I think until I write, just no idea. I don't know if I'm sad or happy. I don't know. I just really, like I start writing and things start emerging. And these last couple years, more than ever, I have needed to write, to get out again, that a lot of the negative emotions that we're experiencing, all of us, are somatic and we have to get them out. And there were times when I felt almost like this pain and suffering and sorrow was coming out through my fingers onto the keyboard, and then it wasn't in my body anymore and I could feel a little more lightness and a little more freedom. I think also I tend to be a person... Culturally women are raised to be a little more reactive than active to respond to the environment around them.

Shauna Niequist:

And it's easy for me to go along with a plan and then realize I've left myself behind quite significantly. And writing reminds me, this is what I want. This is what I care about. This is who I am. These are the things about which I will not be shaken. One thing I always... I was just at dinner with a friend last night and I said, if I could give of a writing prompt to every woman I know I would say, start off the morning, journaling about pain and desire.

Shauna Niequist:

Culturally, men are very in touch with their pain and their desire. We give them that culturally, right? This

doesn't work and I don't like it. This is what I want. This is what I'm longing for. It's okay to say that. It's okay to declare that. It's not always true for women. And so if I can, if you can, if any can get in touch with, what is it that's bringing you pain right now emotionally, physically, spiritually or psychologically. And what is it that you really want? There's a lot underneath both of those questions that most of us don't have places in our life to attend to those things unless we create them.

Emily:

This is so good. And it brings me right to the next thing I was going to ask you Shauna. PS listener, if you are listening, you might be wondering, okay, how can I then begin each day this way? Or what is a way that I can start because to be quite honest, when it comes to writing or journaling, I think you and I really connect in this point, but not everyone does. However, I do think everyone can benefit from a regular practice of writing things down, but it can be overwhelming when you look at a blank page. And so I recently got your Present Over Perfect guided journal in the mail. It is beautiful. It is lovely. I immediately fell in love with it. But I will say I'm a guided journal kind of girl.

Emily:

I have a seasonal journal that I created called The Next Right Thing, guided journal. It's more based on the seasons of life and the actual seasons on the calendar, but it's really encouraging people to pay attention to life as we live it for the very reason that you just said, and yours is filled, filled, I tell you people, with incredible questions, divided up into sections on different topics. But I would love Shauna to hear you speak to maybe the hesitant journaler. Maybe give us a little bit of a pep talk for the role that a guided journal with prompts can really play in our lives, especially for that person who might think this sounds interesting, but is hesitant.

Shauna Niequist:

Totally. Well, I think, yeah, there are some of us who are like, oh, give me a blank journal and I can just town. The origin of this whole project came up because there were people who read Present Over Perfect and they were like, I like it. I like these ideas. I like this journey that you went on. I'd like a little bit more of that in my life. And they said, okay, how? So the publisher came to me and said, "I'd like for you to write a follow-up book that explains to people how to go on this Present Over Perfect journey in their own lives." And we honestly tried really hard. I worked with an editor. We wrote a lot of content and all of a sudden we had this epiphany. We were like, no, we're doing this all wrong.

Shauna Niequist:

I can't tell someone how this journey looks for them. The how is so personal. It's so choose your own adventure. It's so your life, your lifestyle, your deepest values, your dreams. It doesn't matter my how. The point is not that everybody's life looks more like mine. The point is creating something that helps people get to their own present over perfect journey, according to their own desires and values. And so that changed the way we were looking at it entirely. And we said what we want this to be, instead of me telling you what to do, this is me walking alongside you. Like, pretend we're going for an hour long, walk together next to a lake. And I'm going to ask you a million questions not because I need the answers, but because I want you to hear yourself say what it is you really want for this journey for yourself.

Shauna Niequist:

And so the idea, we keep calling it, a journal with training wheels. So if you're a blank page person and that feels like fun and energizing to you, keep going with that. But if you're like, I could use a friend asking me questions, right? That's how we wanted it to feel. We wanted it to feel like you have a little bit

of a framework and of course go as fast or as slow as you want, do two pages and then set it down for two months, do it in a very methodical way every morning. You get to figure out how that works for you, but the point is we wanted it to feel like, like you had some guardrails and you weren't just like, oh, my gosh, what am I doing? But not so many guardrails that you felt like were trying to send you down the path of someone else's life. It has to be self discovery not instruction. Does that make sense?

Emily:

It does make sense. And here I talk about decision making. I talk about discernment and people... But it's the same thing as you like, I cannot tell someone what decision to make clearly. For one, it's just me and a microphone. I don't even know the decisions on your plate. However, when I look back and I hear from people, they'll say things like, oh, you helped me decide to leave my job. Or you helped us decide to move across country and I'm like, in reality, I helped nothing. I did not know that decision was, but it's the principles of asking questions, of having someone name. I love how you said the importance of naming what is it that you want? So many of us are afraid to confess or to declare what it is that we want because we confuse naming our desire with demanding the desire.

Emily:

We think they're one and the same. And in fact, what you want is what you want, whether or not you'll admit it. And if we don't admit it, through the process of for me, journaling is a great way to do that. But if I don't admit it, it will come sideways in the form of frustrations, snipness, anxiety, lack of sleep, all the things that we want to avoid. And I'm curious, Shauna for you, can you think of a time when journaling or writing something down, I'm sure there are a million of them, really helped you make a decision that you would not have otherwise been able to make if you had not written your way through it?

Shauna Niequist:

Oh, absolutely. And it comes just right away to my mind. There was a season several years ago where I had written maybe three books and was starting to do lots of traveling and speaking. And everyone was excited about that. My publisher was excited.

Emily:

They're always excited except for you.

Shauna Niequist:

Right. But looking back on that, it's very clear now, but in that season it felt transgressive and a little bit rude and maybe ungrateful to say, I am on a path I don't want to be on because it felt to me like this is what I was supposed to want. This was the good news. So in that season, in the publishing industry in my life, more speaking events meant success. I was doing it right and it was happening. And I was getting invited to speak at more and more places and further and further away and for longer periods of time.

Shauna Niequist:

And this was what people told me I should want and should love. And I was decently good at it. It wasn't like a disaster. And I learned the skills along the way and I did not have any place to say out loud, I don't like this, because it felt wrong because it felt ungrateful and I was like a brat, like, how dare you not like this, you set the system up for this. This was the end game all along. And it took so much writing every day over and over. And then looking back at it and being like, hey, this person is really sad, this person who wrote these things from hotels and green rooms and airports, she is not living her best life right now but it took... I needed like a lot of evidence.

Shauna Niequist:

I needed to see it on the page before I was even willing to speak it out loud to another human person, because it felt so much like this is what I was supposed to want. How dare I not want it? But when the journaling about it pushed me, it was so clear in black and white on the page, it pushed me to start having some conversations that were frankly really hard. That's not the phone call your publisher wants. But it helped me change my life in such an important way, because I had not yet given myself permission to tell the truth about what was working and one wasn't except in that place. And that's what changed everything.

Emily:

And it takes so much time to become that self-aware and then to have the courage to say, actually, I know this is the thing that they, whoever they are, that they say I should want. But what you have been told you should want does not line up with even how you might feel like you truly made with your personality, with the things that you value, your core values, all those things, it's like the bigger the discrepancy between what they say you should want and what you actually want, the more courage it takes to be honest about it. And that's where I have also found writing to truly help me bridge that gap so many times.

Shauna Niequist:

Absolutely.

Emily:

We have a mutual friend, Laura Tremaine.

Shauna Niequist:

Yes.

Emily:

And I adore her and PS everyone. Shauna and Laura recently had a conversation about journaling on Instagram, it was an Instagram live, we can link to it in the show notes because it's so fun just to hear really the practicals about how you don't like to write in fancy journals and Laura shares hers too. She's like the journaling queen. I love hearing her talk about reading, books journaling, all of those things. But in her book, *Share Your Stuff. I'll Go First*, she tells a story about one of her own heartbreaks, something that she really wanted and then something that went wrong. And then she was heartbroken about it in her own life. And she tells the story about how in the midst of that heartbreak, feeling shame and embarrassment and grief and all the things she said that you normalized her heartbreak for her. And she confessed to you, I can't get out of bed on some days. Do you remember the advice that you gave her when she said that?

Shauna Niequist:

I do. I said, "On the days that you can't get out of, stay in bed and stay in bed as long as you need to. And then when you are finally ready to get out of bed, it will be a truer getting up and walking than it would've been if you pushed yourself and pretended in the beginning." Something like that.

Emily:

That was exactly what you said. It's exactly what you said and if you had not remembered, I had my notes that I can prompt you to remind you what you said, but because it stuck with me when I read that, I'd

heard her tell that story before, and then it stuck with me when I read it in the chapter, I think it was her chapter called, Who was there because it is not what most people would say. I think we've probably all been on the receiving end of advice of, well, your next right thing in the midst of heart or grief or sadness, your next right thing is going to be to look on the bright side, to take some type of action, by all means, do something. Do not do something.

Emily:

And the advice that you were encouraging her and I think that is so powerful when you're at a crossroads and you're in the midst of a heartbreak to be told to wait, to let this do the work it wants to do. And sometimes journaling in that space can be really informative and transformative. But I'm curious is that advice that you had received from someone else and it was helpful to you at a time?

Shauna Niequist:

Well, you know what? I think it is. I think that's one of those pieces of advice that you only give it to somebody you know, because you know what their natural propensity is, right? And that's a way that Laura and I are the same. We grew up together at summer camp. I'd known her for a long time. And we grew up in a world that said, get up, shake it off, go, right? If she or I had grown up in a world that was like, feel your feelings, listen to your body, allow the heartbreak to move through you and transform you. I probably would've said something to the opposite, right? But I knew that we were both... This summer camp, if you... One of the things I always joke about is like, we literally ran everywhere. Why? Why were we running everywhere?

Emily:

Why were you running?

Shauna Niequist:

I look back on it and it was amazing and I loved it so much, but it was very structured, very oriented toward like bells and flags and times and running. And we were both raised with a sense of like Grin and Barrett, keep moving, don't worry too much about your feelings, they don't matter. Just do the next big, fast thing. And so I knew her, I knew her tendency. I knew that she felt a lot of pressure to pretend she was okay. And I knew that because I had felt that when I had been through heartbreaks. And so I think a lot of the best advice we give when it's someone that we really love, it's just balancing the other side of the coin, right?

Shauna Niequist:

I knew her. I knew she wasn't going to stay in bed for three years. I knew she was going to stay in bed for like three days, but I think I'm still not great at listening to my body and listening to my feelings. I still want to overpower them just at every turn, I'm terribly inconvenienced. Every time either my body or my emotions wants me to stop or feel them or something. It's still something I'm learning so much. And it's advice I need to take more often than not. So I think the best advice comes out of friendship. And it's almost always the advice that we need for ourselves.

Emily:

Well, as we close, I have two more questions for you Shauna one comes from a quote of yours from your guided journal. And you said, "I make better decisions when I make fewer decisions. The ambient noise of my life gets quieter when there's less stuff. And in the newfound silences is space for connection, rest listening, and learning." And so I'm curious as a reader, what are some ways you've managed to make

fewer decisions?

Shauna Niequist:

Well, a lot of it comes down to stuff. No one could look in our cramed little apartment and say I'm a minimalist, but I'm inching there. We live in 800 square feet. One great thing about that is it can be just like an absolute total disaster and 30 minutes later, it's perfectly clean. And so I have found that just managing less stuff makes it easier. I have a lot more to spend on other things. I also try to do a decent job of, okay, not responding to the million different options, but being the proactive voice. So when I look at a week, I'll look ahead and say, these are the nights we need to be home. These are the nights I'm going to cook dinner. These are the nights we're going to get takeout. These are the days I'm going to get groceries so that it's not all happening in the moment, because in the moment I just make horrible decisions, right?

Shauna Niequist:

Like, yes, we should go there right now and buy all those things. So a lot of it, for me, comes out of planning and quiet and getting rid of stuff. And by that I mean clothes and furniture and dishes, and also ideas and expectations. And the more the phrase live lightly is really important to me right now. I used to live, kept a lot with me. I maintained a bazillion relationships. I held onto a lot of resentments. I had a million expectations. I had like five sets of dishes. I don't have those things anymore.

Shauna Niequist:

I keep the clothes I like, and I get rid of things constantly. I have like 11 plates because I moved here with 12 and I broke one and it's okay with me. And that sense of lightness, we feel a little nimble, a little flexible. I like having a smaller, lighter life. It lets me do good creative work. It lets me invest in my kids. It lets our life be a little more cozy and slow. When we need to make those adjustments. We need a little breathing space. I have done full, fast, busy, loud, and I've done small, cozy, quiet, light. And I like the ladder so much better just for me, just for how I was made.

Emily:

I recently saw you announce and we don't have to get into it because we're nearing the end of our time, but I'm going to get into it just one little inch because we recently saw you announce the new book, *I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet*. Are you willing or able to say any words about this title?

Shauna Niequist:

Yes. Absolutely. So we recently moved, three years ago we moved from the suburbs of Chicago where both of our families were from where we had spent most of our lives. We'd spent all our lives in the Midwest and we moved to Manhattan with our kids who were 7 and 12 at the time. And about six weeks into our time here, I wrote on a piece of printer paper with a Sharpie and it said, "I guess I haven't learned that yet." And I put it on our blank wall with a piece of blue painter's tape. And I said, okay, here's the deal. All four of us are going to say this about something every day. I guess I haven't learned that yet, because that's what it means to be new in a new city, in a new way of living. You're not dumb. You're not wrong. You're not falling behind you're new.

Shauna Niequist:

And this is the joy of being a beginner again, of being a rookie, of being curious. Every day we're going to learn something we didn't know the day before. That's the deal. And I totally did it for the kids because they were like, oh, they took Spanish at one school, now they have to take French. And now they're figuring out the bus and the subway and the lockers and everything is different. But it came to have really

deep resonance for me in our old life. In a lot of ways, I had become an expert person. That's the funny thing about being a writer, right? You start writing things down and people are like, you seem to know everything, not the case. I just like typing, you know?

Shauna Niequist:

I'd lived in my hometown for a long time. I had been at our church for a long time. There's a certain amount of like, I knew the answers and all of a sudden, I don't know how to get our laundry done. I don't know how to get our groceries. I can never take the right subway and it opened up... But even more than that, my thoughts about my faith were shifting. Our marriage was changing. My close relationships were shifting. I felt like I'm like a beginner in everything right now. And I like it and I like learning and I like being wrong and then making it right and like curiosity more than certainty.

Shauna Niequist:

And it started opening up really good things inside of me saying, well, it became a really freeing phrase. Instead of being like, oh, there's another thing I got wrong. I started saying to myself, I guess I haven't learned that yet. Maybe I'm not too old to still be learning new things. Maybe curiosity and self compassion can be these things. I carry with me into this next season. And they make me wiser because I'm listening instead of more stuck in my way is because I think I know the answers. So that's what it's about

Emily:

Now. We can't get it yet, tell us when that book will be available.

Shauna Niequist:

It will be available on April 12th so it is done-

Emily:

Of 2022. Yes.

Shauna Niequist:

Yes. It is done. It is being copy edited right now, I just finished it about 10 days ago and it will be out in April and we'll do all kinds of... I don't know what we'll do with how the world is right now, but we'll do lots of things via Zoom or I don't know, but thank you for asking about it.

Emily:

Absolutely. Well, final question. And we ask everyone this question at the end when I have conversations on the podcast and you are free to answer it big way or tiny way, it can be today or it can be in life. And the question is, Shauna, what is your next right thing?

Shauna Niequist:

Well, this is just what popped into my mind because I was having dinner with a friend last night. When this next book comes out, there'll be all the things that go along with that. And then I want to become a fiction writer. And I feel embarrassed even saying that out loud because I categorically do not have the skills. I don't really know how at all.

Emily:

Well, you haven't learned it yet.

Shauna Niequist:

I have not learned it yet. Exactly. Thank you. But I love fiction. I'm just crazy about it. I think it tells the truth in some really profound ways. And so one of the next right things for me is, I keep not doing it because I'm like scared and I'm afraid I'm going to fail. And so once this book is done and released, that's the next thing?

Emily:

Do you have a story already Shauna? Now I'm asking you more questions. We need a whole another episode for this.

Shauna Niequist:

That's okay. I do, but what's funny about it is like, because I haven't actually written fiction. Like it could be, I don't know a series that's eight books long or I could write it and be like, well it took 18 pages and I'm done. So I don't know, but I do have a story and who knows? It's not like science fiction or anything. There's no like space involved. It's just about life and about change and family and growing up and all that stuff. But I just really love to try. So I'm going to be a beginner again in that way. And it feels really exciting.

Emily:

Amen sister. Well, I am so grateful. We are all so grateful that you are willing to try something new and helping us know that being a beginner again is a gift, not just for us personally, but also for those around us and maybe even for the whole wide world. So thank you Shauna for joining us. It has been a pleasure.

Shauna Niequist:

It has been wonderful to talk with you. Thank you.

Thanks for listening to episode 198 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of being present over perfect 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 making our lives. You can find Shauna in all of the beautiful books she's written @shaunaniequist.com. That's N-I-E-Q-U-I-S-T, including Present Over Perfect and the journal, Savor, Bread & Wine, Bittersweet and Cold Tangerines. Her new book, I Guess I Haven't Learned That Yet, is available for pre-order and you can find that one wherever books are sold with a release date of April 2022. As always, you can find me online at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman, where I post almost daily. And that's where a lot of the fun conversation happens about this and every episode.

Big thanks to the team over at Unmutable who faithfully edits and produces this podcast every week. And a shout out to Leah Jarvis who gathers up our show notes. In closing, here are some final words from Shauna in her book Present Over Perfect. Present is living with your feet firmly grounded in reality, pale and uncertain as it may seem. Present is choosing to believe that your own life is worth investing deeply in, instead of waiting for some rare miracle or fairytale. Present means we understand that the here and now is sacred, sacramental, threaded through with divinity even in its plainness, especially in its plainness. Thanks for listening. And I'll see you next time.