



200: Ask Emily Anything! Celebrating 200 Episodes

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 200. 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, well, you're in the right place. Typically on these episodes, I'll share a story, a prayer, and a simple next right step. And sometimes I host a conversation. Well, today's conversation is between me and you. Because today we celebrate 200 episodes of The Next Right Thing. Now I thought about doing a state of the podcast episode for this very monumental episode celebration, but I did one of those back in August to celebrate four years. That's episode 187 if you want to check that out. So for this one, we're trying something new, I've not done this before, where you asked questions. I put a question box on Instagram and I'll say words.

What a gift it is to spend a few minutes with you every Tuesday for the last four years, granted we've had a couple of small breaks in between. And technically we have a few more than 200 episodes in the feed, because there was some bonus content in there, but officially this is our 200th numbered episode. And I wanted to celebrate by answering some of your questions. This episode has the most ramble potential. So I'm going to try to do my best to move things along and answer your questions that you sent me one after the other, without too much in between. The questions I don't get to are going to be mainly because the answers are either A, too personal or B, too long, but they have already inspired full episodes, I'll tell you, for example, someone asked me, "What are the top five episodes to start with if I'm new around here?" Well, coming soon to a podcast near you, that would be this podcast. But first welcome to the 200th episode. Our first ever ask me anything. Listen in.

I'll jump right in with a question I have been asked many times over the years, and that is question one, do you play the piano music featured in the podcast? The answer is I do not. There are two pieces of music that we feature here on The Next Right Thing. I got both of them. I got the license from PremiumBeat, which is a website online where you can purchase music to use for things like podcasts. The fast-paced music that you just heard in the intro is called Storytelling Piano by Immersive Music. And then the reflective music that happens usually at the end of the episode is by Alexis Messier called Portrait of Lucy. So there you go. Second question. What's the P stand for in Emily P. Freeman. Well, I'm so glad you asked. It stands for Patrice. And I'm here to tell you, I don't think I knew how to spell it until middle school.

That's Pat-ri-ce, P-A-T-R-I-C-E. Third question. When you do your podcast episodes, do you use a script?

Do you use an outline? Well, I'm so glad you asked this. The truth is that I typically do script out the episodes. Maybe not word for word, but for the most part, I write out all the episodes, almost all 200 episodes you've heard, except for the interviews. The interviews I do have questions that I write out and plan on, but I don't obviously read from a script, because I don't know what the guest is going to say. But other than that, most of my episodes, I do work from a script, except for, for example, today's episode. I just have your questions and I've given myself a few notes here and there to remind myself to stay on track and what to say, but I'm a writer first you all.

And so I got to write stuff out to know what I want to say. One of the things that I knew when I started this podcast was I didn't want to waste your time. One of the things that is a pet peeve of mine, if you will, is when I'm listening to a podcast between, let's say a couple of friends, and they spend the first 10 minutes catching each other up on their lives, and we hear like when they met, and how long they've known each other, and they laugh, laugh, laugh, laugh. Listen, I don't have time for it. I'm sure you are delight for of people in real life, but please get to the content. Speaking of the content, moving on to question number four. Do you ever feel like quitting the podcast? If so, how do you work through those periods? Thanks for the question, Brittany.

The answer is yes. I sometimes do feel like quitting. And the second part of the answer there is, I'll consider it because you have to, when you feel like quitting something, it's important to ask yourself why. And I actually have an episode that could help with this, it's episode 115, and it's called Before You Decide, Halt. H-A-L-T. You've probably heard this before, maybe from a counselor. And that is ask yourself, am I hungry, angry, lonely, or tired? And usually when I think about quitting something, a lot of times, one of those things is at play. But if it's not, and especially if it continues to persist and kind of nag me, whether it's when I'm trying to fall asleep at night, or a lot of times I'll wake up in the morning with thoughts of not quitting the podcast, but with a thought for something else in my life that I'm considering letting go, that's when I know it's probably not a hungry, angry, lonely, tired situation, it might be something else.

But when it comes to this podcast, it's never lasted long enough for me to have to really question it or really seriously answer that question. So far, for the last four years, the podcast has made a lot of sense for me. When it stops making sense, when it stops being fun, when I stop feel like it's the highest and best use of my time, that's when I'll seriously consider stopping doing it. By the way, my English grammar is fantastic in these unscripted episodes. You're welcome. So yes, I have felt like quitting, but usually it's because I'm tired or hungry. Moving on. Question five. Who's one of the most inspiring people you've ever interviewed. What a fun question. Well, what many of you may not know is I have interviewed a lot of people.

You wouldn't know that from the podcast, because I've really only had, I've had probably less, maybe less than 12 guests here on The Next Right Thing, because it's really not an interview style podcast, as you may already know. But in my other job, in Hope Writers, which is the online membership community for writers that I co-founded, that's where we help writers balance the art of writing with the business of publishing. And one way we do that at Hope Writers is we have live Tuesday teachings every Tuesday. And I used to be the one and only host of those Tuesday teachings. So I probably interviewed over a hundred people when I was sitting in that seat. Now I'm no longer the interviewer. We now have a wonderful team of host team at Hope Writers. There's three people who do those interviews now, they rotate. But back when I was doing it, there are three that stick out.

There were so many that were good. But three stick out. One was I got to interview Miss Beth Moore, and let me tell you what I wish I could have done. I wish I could have sat with her for hours and hours and hours, but of course we only had one hour. We talked a lot about writing. We talked a lot about how she decides something's going to be a book. And one of my biggest takeaways for my conversation with her was how she talked about... She almost wishes... A concept, or something that she wants to say could only be said in a tweet and then be satisfied, because if she can say it in a tweet, then she doesn't have to do any other work. But that's usually how she tests her ideas. She starts with a tweet, maybe a couple of tweets, and if that gets conversation going, if that makes her more interested and want to say more, she might turn it into a blog post or a newsletter.

And if that makes her want to say more and her interest or curiosity is not satisfied, then maybe she would turn it into a longer form, something, maybe a weekend talk, maybe one talk or maybe a series of talks. And she kind of builds on it that way. And so finally, when she has too much to say that will fit in any other medium, that's when she decides, okay, I'm going to have to write this book. And she really does talk about a book being the last resort. And I loved that and I don't think that's the way, especially new writers or first time people who want to be authors, we tend to think book first, but the pros know that the book is the hardest thing. And there's so much good work you can do before you ever get to the book.

Two more, one is Richard Louie. So Richard is a journalist and he's a TV person, but then his dad was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. And Richard Louie made a decision to set his career aside for a time to take care of his family, but what he discovered in that process was that it was really difficult for him. That was a really difficult decision. And he wanted to find out why. So eventually that became his first book. Is called *Enough About Me*. And it was a fascinating conversation. I especially loved his posture of... I mean, his book was about selflessness, but he embodies that in the way that he talks, in the way that he just had a humble posture and showed up to our interview like, what can I learn from you? And, how can I learn? I'm a first time author, this is a new world for me.

But here he is, this well known journalist at MSNBC. It was just a fascinating conversation for me. And then another person I interviewed at Hope Writers that was just really inspiring, was a conversation I had with Terrence Lester. He's a minister, a speaker, a community activist. He's an author, but he's also the founder of a not-for-profit organization called Love Beyond Walls. And they focus on poverty awareness and community mobilization. And a lot of what they do is they serve people who are experiencing homelessness. And I think it was just the way that Terrence was just like a regular guy. And he had kind of regular ideas in his steps to making... Some of his, he did have some big vision, but the steps to get there were just really simple. And he made activism sound like everyday life stuff.

And it was so inspiring to me. That was one of my favorite conversations. Now for you, this might not help unless you're a member of Hope Writers, because all those interviews that I did are available only to our Hope Writers members. But I did want to be honest about some of the most inspiring people that I've interviewed and the list is long, but this isn't a podcast just about that. So I will move on. But question six is actually kind of related with that, somebody asked me who's your dream guest for *The Next Right Thing*? Well, I have a lot, but I'll name three. One is Parker Palmer. Second is Brené Brown. And third, I would love to interview Amanda Gorman. If you don't know who she is, she was the poet at the inauguration. The one who wore the beautiful yellow coat and she was the youngest inaugural poet in history.

And the reason why, I mean, there are lots of reasons why I'd love to interview her if I ever had the chance to. But part of it is just the way that she was put in the spotlight so quickly and how she navigated that. I would just love to hear her process there. Not only that, but she wrote this poem, *The Hill We Climb* and recited it in front of the world. What was that like? There are just a lot of questions there that I would love answers for. So that's my answer to dream guests. But the list is long, like I said. Number seven, Rhonda asked, what is the best practice you put into place this year? I love this question. And my answer is fairly simple. It's using my Next Right Thing guided journal. Truly. I use it every week, but specifically the practice for me of recording the questions that I'm carrying that month. And at the end of the month, recording the arrows that those questions are leading to.

So if you don't know anything about this language, I'll point you to two resources in just a second, but essentially every decision begins with a question. And when we can identify what the question is that the decision will answer, the easier it will be for us to make that decision. So for example, if I'm questioning, like someone asked before, should I quit doing the podcast? Well, I would write that question down. By the way, I'm not questioning that right now, but that's an example of a question I would write down there. And then at the end of the month, I would reflect on list of questions I was asking at the beginning of the month and see if there was just one next right thing I could do that could help me make that decision if I hadn't made it yet. So it could be that that month as I carried that question, I had an answer. No, I shouldn't quit the podcast.

Well then there's no arrow needed, because I already have an answer. But sometimes questions that we're carrying and decisions we have to make, they don't lead directly to an answer right away. It's usually we have to follow 5, 10, 15 arrows before we get to a final answer. And so this is just a reflective practice of writing down, okay, what's just one next right thing I can do? What's one next question I can ask? What's one person I can talk to, to help me get to an answer? If you want to learn more about that practice, I have two episodes. One is the big picture episode, 189, *How to Use The Next Right Thing Guided Journal*. It's like a complete epic guide to how to use the journal. Or episode 172, *Make These Two Lists Now*. And that's specifically about how to use the questions and arrows list in the journal. Question number eight, I got several questions about parenting.

Specifically if I had any tips for parenting teens. I don't talk a lot about parenting on the podcast and that's intentional. I don't really talk about parenting anywhere. It's just one of those lines that I've drawn. I'm probably never going to be someone who talks a lot about parenting. But I can tell you three things, tips for parenting teens. Number one, have at least one friend you can tell everything. Number two, listen more than you talk. And number three, and most importantly, don't freak out. Not ever.

Question nine. What's the hardest self-reflection question you have ever reflected about? Listen, that is such a fun question for me. And it was tricky for me to tease it out at first, but as soon as I sat down and tried to answer it, my answer came fast and furious. And I actually have three self-reflection questions that are historically really difficult for me to answer.

Number one is the question, what do you want? That is such an important question that I often ask some of my own creative direction clients that I have. I ask that question to our Hope Writers all the time. I ask it to the team that I lead and hold accountable. I ask it to friends and family members. What do you want? But when it comes to answering it myself, that is tricky. And often takes me a lot of time to really listen

to my own life and listen to the heart of God and listen to my desire. So what do you want is the first one. Second question, self reflection question that's hard to answer is what's mine to own? That one's hard for me to figure out. And when I really reflect on that a lot less is mine to own than I tend to take on.

And then the final one, and you may have guessed this one from some of the episodes I've done, but is it time to move on? And that can be in any area, lots of different areas. And I've done several is it time to episodes over the year here on the podcast, but what do you want? What's yours to own? And, is it time to move on? Are probably some of the hardest self-reflection questions that I've carried for my own life. Question number 10. When did you make the wrong decision? Well, a few people ask this one. I see you Jamie B. Golden. But I'm actually going to answer it, because I've thought about this a lot. I mean, I... Listen you all, I make wrong decisions all the time like we all do, but I don't know that any of them are either public enough to share here or if they'll be interesting enough, but there is one that comes to mind.

It's when John and I first got married. The first year when we got married, I was planning on the first year, maybe working a little part-time, but I was not planning to work full-time at first, because I didn't have to, thankfully. Sometimes we do and that's just the way it goes. But at that particular season I didn't. But an opportunity came along for me to work full-time at a local university. And I considered it and I held it and we both decided, yes, I was going to take this job and do the work. And I did. And it was full time and it was fine. It was great experience. They were great people. There was nothing bad or wrong about the work or the job. But the truth is, that was a really unique season of our lives. And it's a season we'll never get it back.

It was our first year of marriage. And when I look back, I wish I had had the courage to say no. I didn't have the maturity to say no yet, but as I look at the pattern of my life, since we've been married of the last 20 years, I do realize that it is so much easier for me to stay busy and to have something to engage my mind, and my ideas, and my creativity than it is for me to allow space and margin in my life. And that was a time that I had hoped for some space and margin, I had planned for it, and I had expected it, and I quite honestly could have really used it, but I think it scared me. And I don't think I realized that at the time.

If I had had a regular practice of reflection, if I had been at that time a person who was paying close attention to what was life giving, what was life draining, and if I had known myself better, I think my next right thing would've been to either ask them if I could work on a part-time basis or I would've said no to that job altogether, but that wasn't the case, and so I went forward with it. And I ended up working that job until just before the twins were born. And you know the story from there. So that's a time when I... I mean, I don't know if I made the wrong decision because there were... You look back and you make a different choice, but I wish I'd done something different. I really do. And there you go. That was a time. So you're welcome. Question 11, someone honestly asked how to trust in God when people who believe so differently from you say they trust God too. I'm sure there are a lot of us who have this question.

If you think this, and I think the opposite, but we both say that we know and are listening to God and trust God... Listen, the truth is I really don't have a great answer for this. But I will say what's brought me comfort as I've carried this question sometimes, is the simple acceptance that I'm not an expert on God's intentions. That unity doesn't have to mean uniformity. That certainty is not a prerequisite for faith, and that I might be wrong. I think that's part of what it means to have faith. I know that's only a half answer, but that's the best I've got right now. Here's some more. Question 12. Are you planning to write another book? Yes, I am. Eventually. Question 13. Have you found a church? Not yet. What's the episode you most want to write, but haven't? That's impossible.

15, when is your advent study available? This one's easy. It's actually not an advent study. It's called the quiet collection and it's really just a 10 day audio devotional series for Christmas. I release one every year and it will come out after Thanksgiving. So keep your eye out for that. Or your ear, if you will. Number 16. Do you ever regret that writing has become more work than play? Or maybe it hasn't. This is such a fun question. If I can say that, I don't know. I would say no, I don't regret it, because I wanted my writing to become work. This is a dream come true for me. A dream I never realized that it could be a dream. However, you are touching on something that I think is a really important question. And that's for anyone who is of a maker mindset or someone who has an art that they want to professionalize, or to monetize, or to make into their work, is that it does change the nature of the work.

And I think it's important to not romanticize either the writing life, or the singer-songwriter life or whatever the art form is that is yours. In some cases, people prefer to keep that as their second thing and have their first thing be what brings money in to the family, and pays the bills, and is their kind of nine to five. And then the work that they love, be it writing, or painting, or whatever the case may be, is just the work they get to enjoy and don't have to engage in in order to pay those bills. For me, I'm really grateful that writing and this writing life is my job, but are there days when it's hard? Are there days when it's difficult? Absolutely, of course. And it strips you of this idea that writing is this really inspirational thing that you get to do, this really romantic thing that the muse comes upon you, and you write beautifully, and then you get paid to do it.

The money that I get for writing never comes that way. It just comes from boring, continuous, constant sitting down and doing the work like this podcast. It never feels finished. The episodes never feel right. They never feel finished, but it's just time. And so one thing that I think the gift of this writing becoming my work, is that it's taught me to practice the art and to honor the process of it, and to know that even when it's not just so, or I wouldn't even say perfect, because I know better than that. But even when I have an idea of what it could be, when I see the potential and it never quite reaches its potential, it still can change people's lives, can encourage them in their day, can make a real difference in the world. And so do I ever regret that it's become more work than play? No. I'm deeply grateful for it. But is it always enjoyable? Absolutely not. It's not. But here we are doing it anyway.

Question 17, someone asks, what episodes of the podcast do you go back and listen to? And the truth is I don't really go back and listen to very many episodes because by the time they've come out and by the time you hear them for the first time I have both written it, recorded it, and approved the audio, so I've lived it pretty fully by the time it gets out there. But every now and then I'll go back and listen to one that I'm going to recommend or that I'm going to mention to make sure it's relevant to the thing that I want to recommend it for. But I will share a few favorites that I think were really fun ones and really meaningful ones for me to do. A fun one was episode 106 when I got to talk about Disney's Frozen 2.

Many people really came into my inbox you all, when Frozen 2 came out and they showed up at the theater and they heard the song sung by Kristen Bell, The Next Right Thing. And so I finally had to do an episode about it so I could just point people to the episode, because people were asking me if Disney stole my idea, which by the way you all, I have never claimed to be the human who came up with a phrase The Next Right Thing. I hope you know this is a phrase in the public domain that we all... It belongs to all of us. But I did love the story behind the song in the movie. And so I told that story, what I knew of it, and shared just some of my own thoughts about the movie there in episode 106.

So that was a fun episode. And this time of year might be fun to revisit. Another one that I don't necessarily re-listen to, but it's something I think about on the weekly, and that is, well, the concept is not the episode. It's episode 185, Why Makers Struggle to Get Things Done. And it's where I talk about that essay, Makers and Manager that I read, many of you have read. And if you're someone who your day is structured in hourly increments and blocked off by the hour because of meetings or whatever, and you find yourself really struggling to be productive, it could be because you are living with a manager's schedule, but you're actually a maker at heart. And so that's episode 185. Again, I think about that stuff all the time. Another episode that I absolutely loved, and I have listened to this one several times, and it's episode 71, Let Time be Your Friend.

The reason why this episode was so meaningful to me, is I actually worked on it for probably a year. Not that I took a year to work on it, but I just had this idea for it and I kept circling around it, and adding a sentence or two here and there. And it was just a concept of this idea of the passing of time connected into Big Ben in London, connected into the solar eclipse. It's just some of all my favorite things. Probably not very helpful to you, but it was really meaningful to me. So that's episode 71. And then finally, another episode that I just loved making, and I've mentioned this one before is 103. Look for the Children, Mr. Rogers in Decision Making. And this was one that was deeply meaningful to me. And Mr. Rogers was one of my favorite humans of all time.

And so that episode, again, I don't necessarily go back and listen to it very often if ever, but it is one of my favorites that I've done. Someone asked question 18, what's the least favorite part of the podcast for you? And honestly, it's just my own limitations. I wish I had more time to give to it. I think it could be so much better. I think I could do more with it. Now that doesn't necessarily mean longer episodes. I don't want the episodes necessarily be longer. But I do wish I could give more of myself to it. However, when I started it, I knew that this was going to have to be something that I could crank out in one day, which is what I do. Some of you have been around a long time you know that I used to, used to, write, record and edit the episodes on Mondays and then drop them on Tuesdays.

And there was a 24 hour turnaround. Since those first two years, I now partner with a team at Unmutable. And they do my editing for me, which means I can give it to them, six hours in advance I actually have to give. So I tend to record these about a week ahead of time and then send them the audio and they edit for me. So I'm about a week ahead of time now, but I used to be a much quicker turnaround. And that's the way it was designed. I knew it had to be that way in order for me to do it at all, because if I needed more time than that, it wasn't going to happen. And I'm really grateful. And I really still love it. And that brings me to question number 19, which is what is your most favorite part of the podcast?

And that might be surprising, is that I used to wish that I could sing. Now, I can carry tune. It's fine. I mean, I can harmonize, yeah, whatever. But I'm not a singer. And I always kind of wished that I was. But now I get to use my voice in a different way. And I think the most surprising part of podcasting for me has been how much people enjoy my voice. Is that weird to say? It feels weird. But I hear it constantly, almost daily, someone will tell me that my voice is meaningful to them, for whatever reason. That it's soothing or comforting, or it brings some type of... Something that they need for that day. And that's like the actual sound of my voice, which is weird in a way, not weird like the person's weird, but weird like I never expected it. And so that's been a real gift that I have found a way to use my voice in a way that serves people, that is something that is helpful, and brings life in some way to someone's, maybe your day. And that's something I'm just really grateful for and never thought to ask for.

Finally, question 20. What's your next right thing? Well, I'm glad you asked. And it is the question that I end every guest episode with. And so I'll answer this for you about me right now. One of my next right things is to parent my girls through their senior year. It's to continue taking walks with John after dinner. And to get our son through the ninth grade. This year, my word was the word clear, and I've done a lot of clearing this year, both in my inner life and in my outer life. And I'm looking forward to 2022, which will be a time I hope where I can be a bit pickier about how I spend my time, and maybe even more selective about what I say yes and no to. I'm looking forward to 2022 being a time for deeper work, maybe deeper work than I've ever done before.

Thanks for listening to episode 200 of The Next Right Thing. I have loved this simple practice of taking your questions and giving some answers, or at least saying some words. As always, you can find me online at emilypfreeman.com, or on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman where a lot of these episodes often begin with an image, or question, or a fun conversation in the comments. But mostly I just want to say, thank you so much for listening not only today, but for many of you for the last 200 Tuesdays. For being a part of this Next Right Thing community, it has been and continues to be a real gift in my own life and I hope in yours as well.

In closing, a few words from Ann Patchett in her book *What Now?*

“What now is not just a panic-stricken question tossed out into a dark unknown. What now can also be our joy. It is a declaration of possibility. Of promise. Of chance. It acknowledges that our future is open. That we may well do more than anyone expected of us. That at every point in our development, we are still striving to grow.”

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