



205: 5 Strong Ways to Finish Regular

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 205. This is a podcast about making decisions, but also it's 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 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.

There are as many ways to approach the end of the year as there are people. Still, it's easy to be fooled into thinking there's just one right way to finish, and that's strong. For anyone who feels like they might not be able to finish strong this year, here are five strong ways to finish regular, and that might be your next right thing. Listen in.

As is often the case around here, this episode started on Instagram. I was wrestling with the tension that often comes around this time of year. One, where I have this compulsion to finish the year strong, but also an equal compulsion to slowly melt into the floor in a heap and to put all effort on the shelf until next year. In that moment of naming, I said to myself, "I don't have it in me to finish strong. I just want to finish regular."

And so I wrote it out on Instagram, that it's more than okay to try to finish strong if that's the vibe you need, but for the rest of us, it's also okay to just plain finish. There might not be a medal for it, no reward, bonus, cheering crowd, or prize money, but maybe that's not what we need the most anyway. If you can't finish strong this time, you're not the only one. So maybe let's just finish regular. I wonder what might that look like for you.

Well, as always, I'll give you some options. Number one: Be kind. We've survived a lot this year. We even thrived sometimes. Look at us being human and resilient and alive. Look at us being human and resilient and alive. After the last few years, these are things to mark and to celebrate. Consider what your resilience has cost you. Consider what you've survived this year. Maybe the thing we need to remember is that you have good instincts. You can trust yourself, and that some things are good enough for now. So be kind. Be kind to yourself and make room for kindness to others, because remember they've survived a lot this year too.

How else can we finish regular? Two: Be growing. I'll be giving no advice on trying to be the best, be the expert or be the one who has finally arrived, but only be one who is growing. By the way, real growth

can sometimes feel like shrinking, like smallness, like death. All growth does not mean something bigger. They don't teach you that in school. For me, growing as a parent means I have less direct influence than I used to. Growing as a business owner means I'm learning how to delegate a lot of my roles to someone else, to the next generation of leaders. Growing as a writer, these days means I'm doing a lot of hidden work that no one's reading right now. Growing in my faith means my list of certainties, well, it's shrunk.

Growth is good, but it may not present as taller, louder, bigger, or even very noticeable at all. Some of the deepest growth that's happened in my life looks shorter, quieter, smaller, and hidden. If you want to finish well, and if you want to finish regular, be someone who is growing. Just make sure to define your terms.

Next, number three: Be honest. A normal thing to do at the finish is to look back and see where we've come from. You may already know that reflection is one of my most regular and beloved spiritual practices. I look back weekly, monthly, and quarterly. I have a journal created just for that. It's called *The Next Right Thing Guided Journal*, if you haven't heard me talk about it. I sift through the days and the weeks of my life using the photos I've taken, the calendars I've kept and the journals I've written in to help me name narratives, to look for patterns and to follow arrows as well as connect the dots. I believe the best indicator of choosing my next right thing is to pay attention to my last right thing. When did I feel most like myself? What were my favorite yeses and my surest nos? This only helps if I'm honest.

Two questions to ask yourself about the year you've just had; name what's worked and name what hasn't. I do this at the end of every year. I make a long list of all the things that have worked well this year, from my morning routine to my annual revenue. I also make a list of what hasn't worked, like too much travel or not enough fun. Listing what's worked and what hasn't worked is a great place to start. It doesn't require a robust plan for moving forward, but it does invite us to be honest about where we are and how we got here.

Two things, by the way, I'm going to share with you what's worked for me in 2021 as our last episode of the year. And also if you want help to reflect on the year, I have a free download available now with some questions for you to consider before, or as you finish out the year. So you can check the show notes for that download.

So number three is be honest, and number four is be you. Iris Murdoch said, "At crucial moments of choice, most of the business of choosing is already over." That is something to consider. That means if I come to a decision that I want to make and that I have to make that the truth is most of the work of making that decision has already happened because of the person who I am. What we want is for our instinctual choice to be love, or joy, peace, or patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self control. What we want is to understand that the habits of our lives, the way we spend our time, the things we choose to focus on, these things are shaping us into a person, and they will impact our decisions for better or for worse.

As we approach the end of the year, what does it look like to do it as us, our regular selves, the person who we are becoming? We don't have to change our personality, fancy ourselves up, or become some kind of goal setting gurus. We just get to finish as us, as people who are wanting to live lives that aren't distracted, that aren't super overwhelmed or fully afraid or all the way exhausted. We want to make thoughtful, wise, wholehearted decisions about jobs and families and our children's future. And we get to do it as us, as the people who we fully are, as the people who we are becoming. Finishing regular means finishing as

ourselves and not as a try hard version of somebody else.

Finally, number five: Be done. In other words, let the year end already. Marking the ending of things is embedded into our culture. We have parties, finales, celebrations, and farewells. These are all part of our regular rhythm of life. Even our birthdays technically celebrate an ending. When a baby turns one, we're marking the end of her first year, not the beginning of it. When an ending is communal that involves families or groups, it's more likely that we'll mark it. So for the end of the year, you might have a New Year's Eve gathering or maybe you'll just go to bed, but either way, one way to be done with the year is to choose a time to say a specific goodbye to the year before rushing into the next one. You don't have to go out with a bang. Maybe just go out with a period.

It could be as simple as five quiet minutes sometime between Christmas and the new year. It might be as extravagant as a full weekend of communal toasting to the year that you just had. But no matter what it is, do a little bit of thinking about how you'll put a period on the end of the year. And then make it an action. Whether it be putting on a party hat, giving a toast, having a prayer, taking a walk or enjoying a few moments of intentional silence. Remember the goal is not to finish with flare; the goal is just to finish, to do it well, to do it fully, and to do it regular.

So be kind, be growing, be honest, be you, and then be done. Here's to doing our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 205 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of finishing regular 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 our daily decisions are making our lives.

As always, you can find me online at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman, where as I said, these episodes often begin as drafts and conversations. If you're listening to this episode in real time, tomorrow, Wednesday, December 15th, 2021, is the final day to sign up to receive *The Quiet Collection*. After that, this version is going in the vault. So visit the quietcollection.com to learn more and receive a daily audio reflection written and read by me for only a dollar a day. That's the quietcollection.com to learn more and sign up. And if you're looking for that download, *10 Questions For Reflection For the End of the Year*, check out the link in the show notes where we'll make it easy to download for free.

In closing a few words from Scott Erickson in his book, *Honest Advent*, about the sometimes dis-ease that can come with growth. He writes, "The process of growth is always uneasy, because growth never comes through ease. It comes through the stretching and expanding of one's own capacity to push on ahead. And often the change that needs to happen in order for you to grow may leave you dry heaving on the sidelines. Like when you run until you feel like throwing up as you prepare for the day of the marathon. Or the anxiety nausea of packing up your worldly possessions and moving to a part of the world that is unknown to you. Or the gagging nerves of trying to date again. Or the vomitous risk of starting a new career.

The difficulty in letting God grow you is the trust that is asked of you when you aren't quite clear what the outcome looks like. When you intentionally do more sit ups or eat less meat lovers pizza, you may have an image in your mind of what it might look like to feel more comfortable for swimsuit season. But when

you say to the giver of your life, I want my life to be meaningful, I want to serve you with my life, may it be so according to what you desire. You have no idea what secret cosmic strategies have been put into play to answer that request.”

Thanks for listening, and I’ll see you next time.