



216: How to Collect Your Favorite Quotes

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 216. 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 news and information, and the sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment well you're in the right place for discerning your next right thing. Today's question, I love a good quote, but what's the best way to keep track of them and recall them so that they might actually make a difference in my life and my decisions? Great question, listen in.

Back in 2020, when I sat down to finally outline The Next Right Thing Guided Journal, I knew for sure one of the spreads that I wanted to create was a quote page. Now, if you don't have the guided journal, you have no idea what I'm talking about. A brief summary. So the quote page of The Next Right Thing Journal it's basically the whole journal is a 12 month guided journal to help you pay attention to your actual life with prompts, questions, and repeated lists. And so, the quote page to me, I imagined having on the left hand side of spread was lines to write a favorite quote. And on the right hand side of that spread was a place to write what month it was. So that's exactly what we did, we have one page that features one quote per month that can serve as a fixed point as you move through the weeks of your life.

A quote resonates because someone else has been able to put into words, something we need or want to remember. Words, mirror for us, what it means to be human with all the nuance, sorrow, creativity, grief, and joy that comes along with it. And sometimes it's hard for us to find our own words to articulate those things. The best quotes to remember are the ones that remind us of something good, something beautiful or true, or they're the ones that make us see the world ourselves, God, our neighbors in a truer light. They're the ones that help us change our minds or to clearly articulate something we know for sure. So the reason why I wanted to include a quote page in the journal was so that we wouldn't be people who just underline thoughtful words in a book and then move on with life.

How might we instead be people who pause, reflect and carry these words past our first encounter? We underline a quote because it means something, it reveals something, mirrors something, questions something, or inspires something in us, but it does no good if we don't take time to market or integrate it somehow into our life or our work. Now, clearly we can't do this every single time we hear something good, but we can do it some of the time. And so this episode will hopefully help you record quotes with more intention so that they might make a difference in your everyday life. At the beginning of the month on Instagram, I share five quotes in a little carousel post that I've collected throughout the month that I think might resonate with you and then I share those to give you some options to choose from for your monthly quote page.

One of the questions I get asked every month is how I find or choose quotes for that monthly page. At

first, the question confused me because it's just something that I do, I don't think about how I do it or have a process for it. But when I sat down to answer that question, I realize I actually do have a process. And I'm going to share that with you here in the episode. But I also understand that a lot more people might struggle with choosing a quote for the month. Then I thought, and the reasons might be many, but I will list two. One might be you're a reader and you're someone who collects so many quotes. You read so much or you pay so close attention. You have so many concepts in your head that over time, it's really hard to choose one that feels like it's going to represent the month or that you're going to be somehow making a permanent statement.

And that feels too restricting. Well to that, I will say, for example, using *The Next Right Thing Guided Journal*, that page isn't necessarily a direction for the whole month, it's just an intention. So I choose my quotes in just a few minutes. I just pick something that was meaningful when I read it first time. Sometimes it's a concept I want to remember to carry with me through the month. Other times, it's just for that moment. For example, my quote two months ago in my journal was from Scott Erickson's books, "Say Yes" on page 17. He said, "You can always tell a voice of fear when it asks you to leave instead of show up." Or last month I wrote down a quote from Brian Zahnd's book, his book's called *When Everything's on Fire* on page 41, he wrote, "In a secular age, suspicious of the sacred. We still know deep down that some things really are sacred, but sometimes we don't know how sacred they are until they're on fire."

Writing those quotes down, actually help me remember throughout the month. When I felt like disappearing or like I didn't belong, I recognized that as the voice of fear, thanks Scott. Because I wrote them down, they stayed top of mind and helped me to see, for example, all the sacred things in my life and in the lives of people around the world that may have otherwise gone unnoticed until they started to disappear, catch fire or were in danger of extinction. So that's one reason why you may struggle to fill out a quote page in the journal is because there's so many and you can't just choose one. Well, the good news is there's no wrong. There's not just one exact right quote, just pick one and move on.

But the second reason is what the episode is all about. And this will more broadly apply not just to *The Next Right Thing Guided Journal*, although that was my prompt to think about this concept, but it will hopefully apply to you if you're just a person in the world who likes to keep track of quotes, but you don't know a good system for doing it. If you don't have a way of organizing or keeping track of meaningful quotes that you come across, then you might, when it comes time to you needing a quote or wanting to have something to remember, something to write down, you might resort to Googling inspiring quotes about hope or something random like that. Instead of pulling from things that your past self has already decided are meaningful to you. So that's the problem that I want to help try to solve by sharing with you, how I keep track of and categorize meaningful quotes that I come across.

So here's how it works. And I'm going to try to keep it simple, but remember this is not the right way, it's just my way. You might hear what I do and you think Emily, you are ridiculous, and I have a much better way. Well, by all means my friend carry on and do it your way and then tell us how you do it so we can learn from you. But if you need a little inspiration, here's how organizing quotes works for me. It starts as it always does with collection. And this has to happen as you go along. Where do I look? Well, it's just as I'm living my actual life, probably the most obvious thing we think of when we think of quote collection or organization is quotes that we get from books. So that's fiction, nonfiction or memoir. It could also be though quotes from movies or shows lectures, sermons.

It could be something from the evening news or something you see on Instagram. You could be an online essay or blog reader, or it could just be quotes from conversations. How in the world do you find a way to organize quotes and concepts that you hear in all areas of life that you want to remember? Well, first of all, those places, I just mentioned, those are all places that we pay attention to and spaces where we keep

our ears and eyes opened just as human people in the world. But in some ways you might have to train yourself to a new way of seeing and paying attention. This comes more naturally for some than others, but it is something we can all learn. Another thing you have to train yourself to do is to always have a way to record. It doesn't have to be my way, but for example, when I'm reading, I always have a pen or a pencil, because the way that I mark a quote I want to remember, I put a little dot in the margin.

So to be honest with you, most quotes that are meaningful to me are simply marked with a dot in the margin and that's it. They never move beyond the book, but if it's something that's extra compelling, it will begin its journey into one of primarily four buckets. And this is where it gets fun. So if that quote is one that I want to really remember and maybe use again or refer back to, I have one of four options. Number one, my personal journal, two, the notes app on my phone, three, Evernote on my laptop or my desktop, and four, Google sheets. Now I'm going to walk through all four of those buckets, what they're for and how I use them. So number one, quotes that I want to hold onto for the purpose of personal development or spiritual formation, those are going to be recorded in my Moleskin journal.

Literally I take my hand and I write the quote out, write there on whatever is the next newest page in the journal. I don't have a special section for it. I don't necessarily even title a certain way. It's just in order of the date, the next page that comes up, that's where I would put the quote. When I come across a quote that speaks to me personally, like I said before, I'll first mark it with a dot in the margin that might be where it stays, but sometimes I will copy it directly into that Moleskin journal, where I keep my daily writing, sermon notes and notes from when I meet with my spiritual director. So I have a journal just for that. I always record the quote with quotation marks, the full name of the person who said the words. And if I found it in a book, the name of the book and the page number where it was found.

Now this is the best practice just for all of us, but it started fully for me once I became a professional writer and I had to cite my sources down to the page number. And now it's just a habit everywhere, which I think is a really good habit to have. So that's the first bucket, quotes for personal development or spiritual formation I record in my handwritten journal. How do I use those quotes? Well, aside from just my monthly reflection of looking back at my journal and see what resonated, this is also the category that I probably most often pull from when filling out, for example, that quote page in my Next Right Thing Guided Journal. It may also inspire something that I'm learning, so I'll record it when I write down my what I learned this season list, a lot of times that's what those quotes inform something personal to me, something that I've been thinking through or praying through or paying attention to in my own personal development or in my life with God.

So that's the first category where I write the quote and how I use it. The second category are for short form concepts. This is what I call definitions. Now definition quotes, I keep on my phone just in the notes app and it's under a title called Definitions for Life. Anytime I hear or read someone define a complicated concept with simple language, y'all I write it down. For example, in my Definitions for Life app, I have several short definitions for spiritual formation from James Brian Smith, Richard Foster. One of my favorites comes from Michael John Cusick, who says, quote, "The work of spiritual formation is to tend the gap between what we believe and what we experience." You hear that it's one simple sentence, a great clear definition of spiritual formation. Is it complete? No, but it's a great quote to serve as a starting point for the conversation of, well, what is spiritual formation? So other definitions that I have in that document, I have one for race, one for trauma, one for passion, love, apathy, ministry.

And one that stands out is one I heard from my friend and colleague, Keas Keasler, who I think was quoting the book, *The Three Battlegrounds* written by Francis Frangipane, who said, "The definition of bitterness is unfulfilled revenge." So that's another bucket. When I'm reading along and I see something that very succinctly and shortly defines something that might otherwise take a whole lot of words to define, I record those in my notes app with quotations and with the person who said it. I will say usually

those are ones I hear on the fly, but if I do read it in a book, I will also of course include the title of the book and the page I read it on. How do I use those definitions once I record them? Well, one episode of this podcast was inspired directly from the notes app of definitions. I have a few definitions of spiritual direction that I wrote down. And eventually over time I realized that I'd never really defined spiritual direction here for us in *On The Next Right Thing* podcast.

And so that one definition that I wrote down years ago became episode 167, spiritual direction for beginners. Also, when I'm teaching and I use some of these common terms, these notes app definitions come in handy to pull from so that I'm certain that the listener or the student that we're all on the same page. Sometimes it's those simple words that we use all the time in conversation, but they can confuse if we all have different definitions of the thing that we're talking about. And so those quotes are really valuable to me because those are usually really helpful for conversation starters or for defining our terms at the beginning of a lecture or an episode, or just a conversation like I said before. So first category, personal development, spiritual formation, second category, short form concepts, what I call definitions. Now onto our third category, and this might be one of the broadest for me, and that is current projects, keeping track of quotes to use for current projects.

Where do I put these quotes? Well, these, I add to Evernote and I have Evernote, I can access it on the internet. You can have an app also for your laptop, your phone, your desktop, and I can use it in all those places, but I use Evernote for all of my current project. So for example, if I'm working on a book about an elephant, I'm not, but if I was to, well, I would have a notebook, an Evernote called Elephants. And then every time I see a quote that relates to anything about my topic, I would drop that quote into the quote section so whatever other content I'm working on, on my book about elephants, by the way, someone is going to really think I'm writing a book about elephants, I'm not, but just for the sake of conversation, I would have lots of notes in that notebook.

That's how Evernote language is. You have a notebook and then you can have smaller notes that you use. And one of my notes would be quotes, but then I would probably have other notes, like for chapters I might be writing or for research that I've done. And one of them would just be dedicated strictly to quotes and I'd be able to pull from them. I have a section in Evernote for my creative direction clients, people I work with one on one. I have a section for each potential book idea that I have. And I also have a section in Evernote for this podcast. To use a specific and real example, this podcast is its own notebook in Evernote. So the notes for *The Next Right Thing* podcast is each note is an episode, but I also have a note that is for quotes and that means that, for example, this is how I use it. This is the use for these quotes.

If I come across a quote about discernment or decision making, I go to Evernote, I navigate my way to *The Next Right Thing* notebook. I scroll to the note titled Quotes, and then I'll write in whatever the quote was about decision making or discernment. Sometimes if I feel stuck for an episode topic, I'll just browse that quote section of the notebook to see if something sparks my interest. These quotes are also the ones that often show up at the end of the episode, if you'll notice in all these episodes I do, I usually end with a quote. Sometimes those quotes are from things that I've read along the way or things that I've been listening to that have found their way into quotes section of Evernote. The final category is for long form concepts and where I keep quotes for long form concepts are organized in a Google sheet as a topical database.

That sounds very detailed. It's a mess, but I will tell you how I do it. These are quotes that I run across that are meaningful to me and are a subject that I'm always broadly interested in, like *The Wizard of Oz* or spiritual formation, creativity, productivity, quiet, beauty, human connection, and behavior, all of these broad, giant topics, they're not book ideas, but they're just things that always peak my interest. Sometimes it's also certain people in the news or certain current events. They interest me, but I'm not necessarily working on any particular project. And so the way I organize those quotes, it's easier for me to do in just a

broad Google sheet. The way I organize that Google sheet is I just have headings at the top. So in column A, I put the author's name, column B, I put the quote itself and then the source, which is, for example, if it's a book, it's going to be the page number and the book title.

A theme, so for example, Mr. Rogers, or beauty or creativity. The location that I used it in, so for example, if I have this database of quotes, and I end up using a quote, let's say in episode 200 of the podcast, I'll try to put that in the spreadsheet so that I remember, and don't reuse that quote too many places too many times because I am someone organized, but I'm not that organized to remember in the head. So I try to keep track of it online, I mean on the Google sheet. And then also sometimes I'll put the date used, but I have a column for the date I used it, but I don't always write that down. But in general, that is one way to catch just broad topics that you're interested in. One place to put quotes that are meaningful to you. So I've laid this out for you, in somewhat of an orderly way, but I'll tell you, like I said before, until I did this episode, I promise you, I did not realize this was my process.

I just did it this way. And now that I hear it, I'm like, "Oh, I do have a process." My process is as I'm reading and paying attention, I put personal development and spiritual formation quotes in a journal that I write on, that I write with my Moleskin. I put short form concepts and definitions in a notes app that lives on my phone. I put any quotes that have to do with something I'm currently working on like this podcast or a book I might be working on, I keep those in Evernote. And then long form concepts that I'm just broadly interested in, like quiet or creativity, I keep those as a topical database in Google sheets. I guess what I'm also trying to say here is you probably have more of a process than you realize. It could be that your current process isn't working the way you would like. So I hope some of these tips may be helpful for you as you continue to pay attention to the world within you and the world around you, because that's what we're really talking about here, isn't it?

And the scope of things, recording quotes, that's not the point. The point is paying attention and recording quotes is one intentional rhythm, a movement that we can make to pay attention on purpose so that we can grow, listen, grieve, learn, see, and become more of the humans we already are, as we do our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 216 of The Next Right Thing.

I hope this simple practice of keeping a quote journal 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@emilypfreeman.com, where you can also find a copy of this episode and every episode in transcript form. You can also find me on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman, where a lot of these concepts and topics start out as half thoughts and ruminations. They are on Instagram weekly. Well, in closing, I want to share a quote with you.

This one is from Greg McKeown in his book, *Essentialism*, where he writes this, "The faster and busier things get, the more we need to build thinking time into our schedule and the noisier things get, the more we need to build quiet reflection spaces in which we can truly focus." No matter how busy you think you are, you can carve out time and space to think out of your workday. Whether you can invest two hours a day, two weeks a year, or even just five minutes every morning. It's important to make space to escape your busy life.

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