



219: 20 Questions to Ask Before You Say Yes to A Great Opportunity

I'm Emily P. Freeman and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to Episode 219. This is a podcast about making decisions, but it's also about making a life. If you're struggling with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation or if you just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of information. And it's sometimes delightful, but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for discerning your next right thing. Today's question, how can we discern our next right thing when presented with a great opportunity? How do we know when to say yes, sure thing or no, not for me? Great questions. Listen in.

We talked about this way back in Episode 19 if you were around back then, this idea of how to know how to discern if something is a great opportunity for you. That episode was called Choose Your Absence and was 200 episodes ago. Surprise, I have more to say about this and hopefully a little more guidance. Today, I want to help you create your own framework when presented with an opportunity. When it comes to deciding between a yes and a no, it's good to remember first that some things are just favors you're going to do for people who you love.

Other things are just stuff you say yes to because you're a human person or a part of a team or a citizen in your community. Other things might just be your job and you need to take them or do them because you have to pay the rent and you just can't be picky right now. All of these types of scenarios could be at play in the framework that you design in for your yeses and your nos. So remember that when we look at this other category of possibility and that's when something is presented to you as an opportunity of some kind and you have a choice to make. But the choice for you, for whatever reason, it's just not a clear yes or a clear no at first.

You can see the pros and cons. You're wanting to wisely discern between a yes or a no. Throughout our lives we may receive invitations to be part of something that was not our idea. It could come to you through an email, through a mutual friend, a conversation during a staff meeting or a text message. It could come to you from a potential employer, a current boss, a co-worker, a dream collaborator, a favorite author, an acquaintance, a large corporation, a pastor, a friend. So many places where you might hear or learn about a great opportunity.

Chances are you've had it happen once if not more times where you receive an invitation to collaborate in some way to serve on a board, to teach a workshop, apply for a job or mentor a group of people. It could be an opportunity for a media appearance, to write a column, to sing at an event, to run for office, to offer your artistic skill in some creative way. Well, here's a secret that you might disagree with. In my experience, the concept that we call great opportunities is actually a myth. That's because there's no such thing as an objectively great opportunity because no opportunity is great for every human on earth.

My definition of great might be opposite of yours. Likewise, what I would've thought was great five years ago might have changed with time, with experience, perspective or life stage. So the first step is we have to have our own definitions of what a great opportunity means for us. I'm sure we've all been seduced by that phrase a time or 10 in our lives believing someone in authority or in a position of power over us telling us that something is a great opportunity, and we believe them only to realize it was actually a glorified favor or a really hard job.

Maybe you've said yes to someone else's idea of a great opportunity that led you to a lot of success in a particular area of life or work that you actually cared nothing about. My sister would call that a floppportunity. Some opportunities are great, but you are the one who decides what's great for you. Just because someone presents an opportunity to you as a great one does not make it so. Since there's no such thing as an objectively great opportunity, then our work today is to begin to discern what would make a great opportunity for you.

It doesn't start with the invitation. It starts with self-awareness. So if you're listening to this and you are weighing out your yes or your no to an invitation you've received, definitely consider these questions. But know for sure, the best times to answer these questions are before the opportunity presents itself to you at all. So here are some questions to consider before the opportunity comes your way.

Probably if you've been around awhile, these will be familiar. What is life draining and life-giving for you? When was a time you felt most like yourself? What were the circumstances around your happiest yeses? What about your most confident noes? Who are some people you would love to collaborate with one day? What are your personal and business core values? What are you uniquely gifted to contribute? How are you distinctly fashioned to bear the image of God in the world?

What lines are you unwilling to cross? What compromises, if any, are you willing to make? I just rattled off 10 questions that could take you years to answer and that's okay. If you wait until the moment of decision to try to answer all of these questions, it might take some time. In my experience, these are questions we are to be asking ourselves over time on a monthly or seasonal basis, or even just an annual basis. That's why I'm such a huge advocate for a regular practice of reflection so that when the moment of decision comes, we'll be better equipped.

But the next step when it comes to a good opportunity is when the invitation is presented to you or the opportunity arises, get really clear on the ask. That is the who, the what, when, where, why, how long and how much. Don't worry about being annoying or being too picky. If the asker is by your questions, then probably that's an easy no. A great opportunity for you will be a clear ask, no hidden agendas, no unreadable fine print, no manipulative bait and switch.

Every new opportunity has potential at first. And if you're unsure of your own calling, if you're not sure of your own giftedness or direction, then following the opportunity trail might be a way to keep yourself busy, but it might not actually be leading you in a direction that you ultimately want to go. So know yourself and then know what the opportunity requires.

Here's a great example I heard recently of knowing yourself. I was listening to Annie F. Downs interview Kristin Chenoweth on *That Sounds Fun*. Such a great episode, but in it Kristin said the way she determines whether or not to take a role is that at first she reads a script and then she asks herself a question, "Is this Kristin Chenoweth and nobody else? Are you going to be mad if you sit home and watch it and somebody else is playing your role?" If the answer is yes then she says that's a huge arrow toward a yes for her.

So that's an example of knowing yourself. Here's an example of getting clear on the ask. I'm currently reading former Bachelorette contestant Rachel Lindsay's memoir. It's called *Miss Me with That*. In it, she

shared about the opportunity she had to become the first black Bachelorette and how she felt torn in the process. At first, she was shocked and excited at the idea. “What a great opportunity to make history, to have some fun, to have the experience of a lifetime and to possibly even fall in love.” But once she got the contract and read the fine print, she had to come face-to-face with what this great opportunity really meant and whether or not she was willing to sign on the dotted line.

It may not have been a yes for everyone. Yes, it is an opportunity, but was it a good one for her at that time of her life? Ultimately she decided that it was. She weighed all the options, she decided her non-negotiables and in the end she went on to marry the guy she chose. But the point here is that she had to get clear on the expectation of the ask before she could truly discern if this was an opportunity she wanted to say yes to. And we have to do that too. Knowing ourselves and getting clear on the ask are the first two things to do, but this might not be enough. And so the process of discernment continues.

Here are some questions that I ask myself at this stage. Now these questions are somewhat of a group effort. It’s a combination of questions that I’ve come up with. Also, questions asked of me by my former and beloved business coach Beth Silvers, by my spiritual director who I’ve been meeting with for the past eight years, by my sister, my no mentor Myquillyn Smith also known as The Nester. And just like I said, from my own imagination.

These first few come from Beth who asked me as I was weighing my own opportunity a few years ago, “What do you want to be learning in this season?” For example, if you’re wanting to improve your public speaking, then saying yes to speaking engagements might be more of a great opportunity to you because you want to get that experience. Maybe here you would consider your seasonal posture. I talk about that in my Soul Minimalist guides for spring, summer, winter, fall. We always choose a seasonal posture. So is this a season for fun or connection, for healing, for rest?

This is why reflection is so important because you’ve already named what your posture is this season. So when an opportunity comes along and it matches, well, maybe that’s an easier yes for you. If I’ve already pre-decided that this is a season of connection with my family and then an invitation to do a TEDx Talk this quarter that comes my way. It hasn’t. But I’m just saying if it were to, super cool, amazing, but maybe that wouldn’t be the right fit at a particular season in time because I’ve really decided this is a season for rest, and knowing that big opportunity would take away from that.

Or even if you had decided this is a season for rest, but an opportunity comes along that checks a whole bunch of other boxes, then maybe you talk with your people and that’s a compromise you’re willing to make. You see how it’s so nuanced and it’s a framework, but it’s not a checklist that is rigid or something that can’t change. Just remember this is your framework. It’s not a framework. No one else can tell you what matters to you.

A second question that I remember Beth asking me was, “Who do you want to be learning from?” And so I had to consider, “Who do I want to learn from in this season? What collaborations or partnerships would be life-giving to me?” And maybe I would be willing to sacrifice something else. Like, for example, let’s say there was an opportunity that came along that was a volunteer position, but it was with someone I really wanted to learn from, well, that might be more of a yes for me in this season than it maybe would’ve been a year ago or a year from now.

Number three, a thing to consider, does this opportunity bring in revenue? If not, that doesn’t mean it’s an automatic no unless it is an automatic no for you. It could be an important consideration.

A fourth question. What are my guidelines for travel? Do you always travel with a buddy, a partner or an assistant? Do you only travel within a certain distance from home? Are you in a season of no traveling

right now for whatever reason? Again, these are questions to consider as you create your own framework for what a good opportunity would be for you. And if I haven't said it yet, I think I have. But if I haven't, this framework could change over time. But these are helpful questions to ask ourselves as arise, every opportunity that arises, especially if it's not a clear yes or no.

A fifth question. Would I volunteer for this? This one is more of a simple way to test your want to. If this opportunity was called out into a crowd, would you be tempted to raise your hand to be picked for it? I think that's interesting question to ask.

Number six, does this align with my personal core values? Spoiler alert. This means you have to have some.

Number seven. How much say will I have? In other words, is this great opportunity really great, but it's going to require you to sacrifice all of your agency to make this per partnership work, or how much control will you have or how much are you willing to give up?

Number eight. Would I enjoy this? Don't forget to ask this one. Again, this alone might not be enough as sometimes a good opportunity for us might be something that leads to great results or outcomes that we want, but it's not so something we particularly always enjoy, but still it's really good to know your answer to this. Because usually something that's a great opportunity and aligns with your core values and helps you to learn some things that you want to learn with people that you're hoping to learn from, that's usually something that you'll probably enjoy. So I think it's go a to ask yourself that question.

Number nine. Do you feel possessive or protective of this role? And this hearkens back to Kristin Chenoweth's test. If they ask someone else, will you be jealous or envious or have a fear of missing out? Now, again, I don't recommend this to be the only or even the most important line item because there could be a tendency to make a decision based on fear rather than based on a calling or an invitation that you feel towards something. But I do think it's great to know and it can help to gauge how much you really care about a thing.

And then finally, number 10, name your Oprahs. In other words, is this a dream collaborator for you? Just like all the other questions, this wouldn't be the only indicator of a yes. But I think it's good to know who your Oprahs are and what I mean by that is quick story. Back when my sister first started putting an autoresponder on her email over the summer, she would say that she would read the email, but she won't be able to respond. So if you really want to hear back, then you'll need to email back later unless you're Oprah in which case we'll get right back to you, which is kind of a joke.

But the idea is there are probably always some people who were like, "I don't care the answer to any of these other questions, but this person wants to collaborate or if this company wants to work with me or if this invitation comes my way, it's going to be high on my yes list." Now, Oprah might not be your Oprah, but do you have one, a company, an author, a leader, an educator, a friend, or a person in your community, a creative who you desire to collaborate with or learn from? And that they are so high on your list that would immediately jump to the top of a great opportunity list for you.

Again, it doesn't mean it's an automatic yes. Hear me. You must still find out that who, what, when, why, how long, how much questions, but this is another great arrow that we can use to determine is this a great opportunity for me. Now, if you've been counting, this episode gives you about 20 questions to help you create a framework for defining your own good opportunities.

Would this exact opportunity be considered good for someone else? Maybe, maybe not. Depends on their own framework. Might I also say that I tend not to list prayer as a question or a bullet point on these types

of episodes or any type of list like this. Because to me, the whole list is a prayer. Naming our core values, our longings, our boundaries for our yeses and noes, our preferences and desires for travel, our need for revenue. These are all done with a deep awareness for me of God's presence within me and around us. God is too big to be a step toward a goal. God is before us and behind us and all the way around. It's important to remember that.

Another thing that's important to remember is this. You may answer all of these questions. You might go through your own process of creating your own framework. You might say a confident or a no. And when it's over, you may learn that this opportunity wasn't great for you after all. Welcome to humanity. Release yourself from the expectation of being able to know the future. Instead, trust the process, practice discernment, and believe that you're headed in a good direction even if every step might not turn out as you expect and then continue to do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to Episode 219 of The Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of defining good opportunities can be one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life can continue to grow. Because it's true this is a podcast about making decisions, but the bigger truth is that your daily decisions are making your life.

As always, you can find me online at emilypfreeman.com or on Instagram [@emilypfreeman](https://www.instagram.com/emilypfreeman). A fun announcement to share with you. Next week marks the third anniversary of the release of The Next Right Thing book. To celebrate, we'd love to hear from you. Leave us a voice message with an answer to this question. Tell us about your favorite yes. It could be a time saying yes surprised you. Maybe it was something that you'd been hoping for that finally came your way or maybe it was a tiny yes that you gave to yourself that's blossomed into a simple life-giving moment in time.

Big or small, we'd love to hear about it. So send us your answer via a voice memo telling us your first name, where you're from and a short description of your yes. The instructions are in the link below. We can't wait to celebrate all of the times yes was your next right thing. For now, thanks for listening and I'll see you and hopefully hear you next time.