



225: Discerning Your Next Right Thing After High School

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 227. 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 for discerning your next right thing. Today's question, how can you move forward when you feel stuck, overwhelmed, out of control, or like you're doing it all wrong?

My guest today brings simple advice with a nuanced angle, inviting us all to trust the process. Stephanie Duncan Smith is a senior editor at Baker Books, where she coaches and champions authors to bring the best out of their message. She's worked in book and digital media publishing for over a decade, developing best-selling and award-winning writers. And personally, she's also a writer. She writes Slant Letter, which is an email newsletter for writers looking to deepen their craft and tend to the soul of their work, which we plan to tell you all about. What does it look like to trust the process in parenting, faith and writing? Listen in.

Emily:
Stephanie Smith, welcome to The Next Right Thing.

Stephanie:
Thank you. So glad to be here.

Emily:
I have been looking so forward to this conversation, and as we get started, I need to ask you, can you tell us or tell me the year that you first started editing professionally?

Stephanie:
Oh, wow. Great question. Well, I started in publishing in 2009, but I actually started in the publicity department, which I'm so glad because it gave me a lot of those skills of identifying the hook of a project. And now in my editorial process, I bake that into the editorial end. But when I first started editing, it was probably 2000 maybe 10, 11. I started picking up freelance projects, which is how I started in editorial.

Emily:
Because I ask for several reasons. One, to give the listener some context of kind of when you entered this world of publishing, but also because I remember the first time I met you was at a writing conference, or I think it was She Speaks or I think that's the one it was, in Charlotte, and you had just started. I don't know if you'd just started as a publicist or if you had just started as an editor, but I remember meeting you in a giant conference room. It was like the speakers and guests kind of came, and I just liked you right away. I

thought, “If we had a chance to hang out, I feel like we would be friends.” I still think that.

Stephanie:

I love hearing that. Yeah, that was a long time ago.

Emily:

It feels like-

Stephanie:

That was a long time ago, but yeah.

Emily:

Right. In internet years, that was I feel like 30 years ago, but it was-

Stephanie:

Oh yeah. Yeah.

Emily:

That’s not a fact.

Stephanie:

Yep. It was definitely pre-TikTok and pre- a lot of other things going on right now. That’s for sure.

Emily:

So many things were pre-TikTok in my life. Well, one of the things that I am really looking forward to talking to you especially about is this whole idea of trusting the process. Here on the podcast, we’ve been doing this for many years, and one of the things that I get into conversations with people a lot obviously is about decision making, and a lot of times it’s people will email me or they’ll DM me on Instagram or I’ll get into conversations with people in real life, and it’s usually there’s something before us that is like, “Should I go this way or that? Should I choose this thing or that thing?”

Emily:

We have this kind of binary thing in our head of there’s a right and a wrong way. And even the title, *The Next Right Thing*, could imply to some that there’s also a wrong thing that you don’t want to do. So I try to encourage people to think in terms of more focusing on the word next than on the word right. But so this concept, though, of trusting the process, I think is... you talked about something being baked in, it’s really baked into this idea of doing the next right thing in decision making. So I would love it if you could just kind of start us off broadly in when you think of trusting the process just in life and maybe even especially when it comes to decision making, what does that mean to you?

Stephanie:

Yeah, trusting the process is one of these phrases that is in the water. It’s something we hear a lot about, and I think in its broadest sense in life and decision making, in our spiritual lives, it jogs a couple things in my memory right away. And one is that trust implies that there’s a relationship here and that there is a presence that you are trusting, and that right there can be a consolation, I think, in whatever quandary, decision, sticking point you’re in, when you know this isn’t just some patronizing, “Oh, just trust the process. You’ll be fine.” It’s not that. It’s trust, and trust is always an act of great risk and vulnerability, but also relationship, which is the encouraging part. I love that frame, that this, it’s a relationship and we can trust because we know that we are loved and not that everything will work out in the end, because I don’t think that we are promised that, but we are promised that we are never alone and we are always loved. Trust I think for me begins there.

Stephanie:

And the process extends to... so here's the thing. In my editorial work, and this also is a life thing as well as an editing thing, but the conclusion I've come to is that trust the process is actually an incomplete sentence. So as an editor, I'm going to do my editor thing and I'm going to edit it on the spot, which is if I could complete the sentence, it would read like this instead. "Trust the process by putting in the practice," because if you trust whatever life situation you're in, if you're deciding which direction to go, and you're like, "I'm just going to trust. I'm just going to sit here and trust," but you never take those next steps, you're not going to move forward.

Stephanie:

There is an invitation to step into the practice, which means roll up your sleeves and take that next step and actually engage your muscles in the forward motion of your life. So I think there really, those two elements always go hand-in-hand. There's a trust, which is a kind of relational internal posture, but then there is practice, which is fully embodied and actual in the real world, and those two things have to speak to each other as we move through our lives.

Emily:

Do you find that phrase, trust the process, and I love that idea of bringing in the practice piece to it, because really you could say, "Trust the process and do the next right thing." Those two-

Stephanie:

Right.

Emily:

That's kind of your practice piece of it.

Stephanie:

Yeah.

Emily:

Do you find it to be more... there are areas of your life for trusting the process where it comes more easily or more difficult, whether that be professionally or parenting or in relationships, where you find yourself hitting a wall or wanting to shake your fist at that concept more in some areas than another?

Stephanie:

Trusting the process is hard when... it gets really hard when it involves someone you love, you know?

Emily:

Yeah.

Stephanie:

You just really want the best and you want thriving and blessing for people you love, and when there's some unknown in that, man, that is hard to trust that all shall be well. And again, only in the sense that we are loved and we never walk alone. I mean, that's the extent of the honest promises that can be made, I think, so I think it becomes difficult when there's love involved and we just want the best for someone. For myself as a... we're just going to go personal, then, if that's okay, Emily.

Stephanie:

I am one of the many, many people who became a parent during the pandemic and we all, I think, living in COVID years, has exposed and revealed and shaken up so many areas where we struggle to trust and

we confront headlong our illusions of control. So we all have our experiences of that, and I would say for me personally, becoming a new parent in this absolutely vulnerable time is really earth-shattering. And I'll just give you one example. My daughter is 17 months now, and her birthday was the peak of pandemic death in our city, in our hospital. I am so glad I did not know that at the time.

Emily:
Yeah, no kidding.

Stephanie:
I discovered that afterward, but her birthday, and first of all, how do you reckon with that? Just this absolute juxtaposition of life and death in the same hospital.

Emily:
Yeah.

Stephanie:
And what was a beautiful day for our family was an absolute nightmare for many other people and families and loved ones. And that's quite a polarity, quite a day to be born into, but it also just exposed here's this newborn, totally new in the world, and it's my job to keep her safe and my job to do what I can to make sure that she's loved and has what she needs. And that's a tender, vulnerable time for any parent. And then all the while, just trying to navigate the logistics of COVID for a kid who can't be vaccinated yet.

Stephanie:
And so that trust is tested, and I think what has elevated for me out of that, too, is that wherever there is tension in our lives where you're like, "Oh, I just want to keep them safe, but I'm so limited in how I can do that," or, "I just want to be the best parent that I can, and I'm also human," wherever you feel those tensions, that is a place to grow and it is a space of becoming. That's not something to be afraid of, but something to lean into, because the tension is where that trust I think is tested the most, and also we develop those muscles that can hold us up through the tensions. I think there's an invitation there for all the scary bits, as well.

Emily:
Well, first, thank you, Stephanie, for sharing that really paradoxical day of bringing life into the world and celebrating that, but also holding this difficult reality of life and death all at one time. And I can relate to the difficulty of trusting the process, exactly what you said, when it comes to people who we love. I'm at the other end in some ways of parenting, not the full other end, but one of the other ends as my twins are preparing to graduate from high school.

Stephanie:
Yeah.

Emily:
And I tell you what, I think part of the struggle for me personally with trusting the process is I feel responsible for what the process should be. Like, "Well, who's going to say what the process is? How can I trust something that is unknown or that is uncontrollable to me?" Even just yesterday, speaking of being vulnerable, I'll do that, I was talking with my counselor and I was sharing with her, just kind of went down the checklist of all the things I couldn't control. And I said, I think I even said out loud, "I have no control here." I kept talking, "Blah, blah, blah, blah," all my things, and then she slowed me down and said, "You said a few minutes ago that you have no control, and I'm curious if you would be willing to repeat that and put your hands on your heart and take a deep breath and say you don't have control."

Emily:

So I did that a couple of times, and she invited me to recognize that while I don't have control, I do have choices. And that was really helpful for me to recognize the difference. One is sort of like this graspy, grabby scarcity, fear-based thing, and the other feels more grounded. I have choices and that's part of the process, is naming and recognizing what choices do I have here? Not every choice is available to me, but some are. And one of them is, for me in this season, I have the choice to celebrate my girls as they graduate from school because that is the process. That's what we all hope for. We hope they get to this. And while there are lots of unknowns and lots of things that I certainly can't control and choices that are theirs to make, I do have a role here and I have a place here and I can trust the process of watching them grow up, even though it's kind of scary to be quite honest, but also it's really beautiful.

Stephanie:

Yeah. Wow. The choices part of that is so powerful, and I think there's so much grappling to be done in that both/and of our agency, which is very real and always ours, and the absolute lack of control we have over external circumstances, you know?

Emily:

Yes.

Stephanie:

Right. We don't get to choose what the process looks like. I have a front row seat in my work as an editor to the observations of the angst that happens when we expect the process to be a perfect one, and then guess what? It's not. And of course that's a life dynamic as much as a writing dynamic, but we put so much expectation on things being linear, and things are never linear. They never are.

Emily:

It's the worst. Why can they not be? And I'm glad you took us here, Stephanie, because I really did... I mean, we have to talk about writing. We're going to have to do that and we're going to do that right now. I think one reason why... I've thought about this a lot. One reason why I think we imagine that the process, whatever that is, whether that's someone else's experience or whatever, is linear is because in the telling and the reporting of someone else's process, they tell it in a linear fashion. That's what storytelling does so that we can make sense of it.

Emily:

So our experience of other people's process as they retell it after the fact seems linear to us in many ways. And yet as you live and walk through it, it's peaks, valleys, twists and turns, and you're like, "I must be doing this wrong because this does not look anything like what they have reported to me this looks like." I think that's just the nature and the limit of language. So I'm curious from your seat, where you sit in the front row as an editor, what do you say to writers who, they've somehow convinced a publisher that they can write a book and they get going and then they freak out and they have that angsty time, which by the way, is part of the process?

Stephanie:

Exactly.

Emily:

But what do you say to them as someone who has witnessed that moment, I'm sure, countless times?

Stephanie:

Oh, man. What I usually say when I hear that exact space from writers is, "That sounds just right"

Emily:
Yeah.

Stephanie:
Which is kind of annoying. It makes [inaudible 00:17:46] kind of annoying.

Emily:
Yes, but also a deep relief. Yeah.

Stephanie:
Yes. I hope so, ultimately, but it's like, "Yep, that sounds about right," because it does. Because I don't know a single writer who does not knock up against those moments of going, "Is this all trash? Is this all a mistake? Should I just scrap it all?" I have not yet to meet a writer who has not experienced that, and as Anne Lamott has said in other ways, I'm paraphrasing her, but if I did meet them, I don't think I'd like them very much or something.

Emily:
Or trust them.

Stephanie:
Like she says. It's like, "That does not seem right. I don't think so. I definitely don't trust that." You're in great company, is what I would say. You're in great company, because you're right. What you're talking about, the linear flow of stories, we only experience... Okay, pick a book off your shelf with a narrative, any book. It's gone through probably years of deep work reflection, revision, editing, outside eyes who are helping you make it better, and then finally, publishing it.

Stephanie:
What we're seeing is the final cut, and what the writer is in in that moment of their greatest angst is the rough draft. So why do we expect the draft to be at the place where the final cut is? That's not really fair on ourselves, and I think there's so much grace for things being in progress, in process. And there's also, like we're talking about, things don't just go from point A to point B in a straight line. They swivel and swirl and it feels crazy, but that's exactly the process. So I think we make it harder on ourselves when we expect perfect conditions along the way, and we make it harder on ourselves when we don't give ourself the space to create the dust that's part of the creation process.

Stephanie:
It's like when you pass a construction zone and it's like, "Pardon in our dust," it's like, "Nope, you don't even need to apologize for the dust. It is part of making something really good." So just let yourself have that, is my encouragement to writers who are feeling that, and talk to any writers and you know you're not alone in this.

Emily:
One of the things you say that I love is that writing can be a profound practice of spiritual formation and that the editorial process at its best is a pastoral process. Can you say more words about that?

Stephanie:
Yeah. I think writing, I'll start with the writing. Writing can be a profoundly spiritual practice because it demands so much of you and it demands not just one category of your life, but your whole person. And it doesn't matter what you're writing about. This is true whether you're writing a deeply personal memoir or you're writing an academic work that has zero first person at all. There might be different shades of experiences there for sure, but writing is deeply personal work because it requires the fullness of your attention and your experience of all the senses. And it's speaking person to person, which again, there's a

spiritual communion that can happen there, or at least that's the hope. That's the fullness of its potential, I think.

Stephanie:

And I think the writing process, because it requires so much of you because it can be so angsty, because it can stir up so many insecurities and questions and doubts, that's a place where you have to grapple with all of those things. And I believe that God meets us there in that process. So I think staying awake to that as you write can be very heartening. We're able to take heart knowing that you are stretching creative muscles in writing that are making you into a person that I think you really want to be, which is pretty cool and encouraging, to be the kind of person who pushes back against resistance and shows up and tells the truth. That's a big deal. That's something to feel proud of for all the angst.

Stephanie:

And then for the editorial process, again, so I recently completed my master's in theology, which, I took the scenic route. It took me over seven years to finish because I work full-time and did classes in between the cracks. But part of my impetus in enrolling for this program, it was two things. First, it was I really want to... in my role for a Christian publisher, I'm helping supporting create books for the church that will shape the church, and I want to do that well, and to do that well, I want to have the depth and breadth of history and understanding of different expressions of faith across the church.

Stephanie:

So I wanted to equip myself with that, but then also, because writing is so personal and brings someone into a place of, I believe, spiritual formation, I really wanted to... I feel like it's my duty as an editor to meet a writer there and give as much to the process as they are from my end. And I think that is meeting someone in a place where they're being formed. It can be a tender place. It can be a really powerful place, too, but recognizing this is really hard and you need a good guide. You need someone who's able to speak truth objectively to the work that needs to be done, but also speak words of encouragement that are just as true and be a good shepherd through that process. That's my goal. And if I'm doing it right, then that's how it's done.

Emily:

One of the ways I think you do this so well uniquely as Stephanie Smith, is that you talk a lot about the fact that if content is king, the angle is queen and you say, "And she's one classy lady." Can you tell us a little bit more about the importance of angle and slant when it comes to our writing?

Stephanie:

Sure. So, the slant is not my original idea. This is all Emily Dickinson, as many people will immediately recognize, but she has this wonderful poem. Part of it is tell all the truth, but tell it slant. And there's more to the poem that's interesting. I think everybody has asked, "What did Emily mean?" And there's different reads on that, but here's mine. Mine is we as people, the human brain deadens to things we have heard a million times before. Tell me something that I've heard a hundred times and it will roll right past me. But tell me something that I maybe knew intuitively but you've just named it for me in a completely fresh way that snaps me to attention, well, I'm listening. And to me, that's the slant.

Emily:

Yeah.

Stephanie:

It is the craft of naming something that's always been true, but in such a fresh, creative way that suddenly I'm paying attention. Any book on my shelf, any sentence that I've ever underlined, that is the craft that's at work, this slant, which is just providing a different angle. And I think how this shakes down really practically for a writer, I think your angle is, it holds at least two things. One is your unique vantage point.

How you see the world, how you see your topic, how you see your theme, because nobody has your exact, precise set of life experiences and perspectives. That's yours and that's unique and wholly yours.

Stephanie:

Then number two, no one has your particular voice, so your angle is both the precise, unique way you see the world and the unique precision of your voice, which no one else shares. And when it comes to writing voice, that's what kind of language you're using, the way you talk. Are you funny and that's how you get a point across? Are you poetic? Are kind of irreverent or deeply prosaic? What does that sound like? And those two things brought together will yield I think a really creative angle that sparks fresh attention. And I think it's also worth noting an angle is not something in my experience that anybody magically wakes up with one day, it is only the result of deep reflective work that takes time.

Emily:

Yes.

Stephanie:

So in my work with authors, it is my greatest joy in my job getting to see the beginning of an initial, early idea that I might say is a topic or a lead, but it's not really an angle yet because it doesn't have that edge to it. And then I get to see them kind of get deeper and deeper and deeper, and then finally arrive at, "Okay, this is the thing that I'm trying to say. This is the essence." And when that happens first, just witnessing the creative joy of that reward is really awesome, but also, it's a process. They don't start there. It's something you have to dig for and work for, and then you get to feel really proud when you've found it. But I do not believe it's that cliché of the light bulb moment that just happens.

Emily:

And that's the myth, is that if you're a good writer, then you get that quickly, and if you're not doing it right then you're just not cut out for this, because that's what we tend to think, is if I don't have that angle or if an editor even says, "Hey, this is a great idea sort of, but you're going to need to sharpen it or give me something, an angle that is a little bit different or eye-catching. It's like, "Well, I can't do that." Well, you can't do that today, but you might have to write your way through it." Again, that's part of the process and we all have to go through it.

Emily:

I talked about a decision-making book with my editor for a year and she was like, "Keep working, keep working." There was no contract. There was no book proposal. There was just ideas that I was kind of riffing with her, and she was wise enough to continue to send me on my way and to say, "Yeah, okay. There's something there," but she knew it wasn't there yet and I knew too, but I think having that hook of the idea, the concept of just doing the next right thing and kind of all the things that can circle around that, that gave me a bit of an umbrella to run underneath, let's say. So I think that finding slant or writing your way to it is a great example of what can happen as you trust the creative process. And it takes time and there's no formula for how long it takes, but I will say, listener, if you're a writer and that's something that you're like, "I understand that's true. I also have no idea how to begin to learn my own process of finding slant for my own work," Stephanie can help you. Tell us how. Tell us about Slant Letter.

Stephanie:

So, Slant Letter, it really started as a personal project. And I mean, it still is, but it's a purely personal side project. It's an email newsletter. I run it through Substack. It's free. Here's the thing. There are so many resources out there to help writers who want to get published, and this is intentionally not that, because I feel that those are already out there. What I'm really writing about and writing toward is two things, how to find that slant. What is that slant? Let me help you in that discovery journey. And then two, actually turning back to what we were talking about before, my hope is to tend to the angst in the creative process by speaking to soul care for the writer, because as we've talked about, I do believe that the writing process

can be a deeply spiritual process and a place where formation happens. So let's talk about that. Let's look at that. What does that look like and how can we grow through it? Every issue has an essay about craft, and then we also move into a prayer or a benediction for the writer who's in that creative space.

Emily:

How often do you send it out?

Stephanie:

It's about monthly, and I'm moving toward more regular issues now that I'm past my grad school, so lots more to come.

Emily:

Yes, we vote that. We vote that option, more regular issues. I get this letter, I love this letter. I always save it because there's so much goodness in it, so writer, if you... any writer I think can benefit from Slant Letter. And they can just go to slantletter.com if they want to sign up for it for free. Is that right?

Stephanie:

That's right, slantletter.com. Also, for new subscribers, I actually have created a guide that is just for the writer who is trying to discover and distinguish their angle. So that's there for new folks.

Emily:

I love it. One more thing I'd love to just chat briefly about before we close out, and what a wonderful conversation. I have loved every minute talking with you, Stephanie, but for those writers who may be on more of a professional track, who maybe have written a book or who are in the process of writing a book or who have been told, "You're doing great. You're a good writer, but your platform," we've heard that word. All that means is the number of people who are paying attention to what you have to say is too small.

Emily:

And a lot of writers, any writer who's ever tried to get their work published traditionally or tried to sell a book on their own understands the importance of platform. And a lot of us writers, especially writers who would sign up in a heartbeat for Slant Letter, because we are all about that soulful part of the writing process, the art and craft, when it comes to the business side of publishing, of growing our platform, I put that in quotes, or of finding readers, it can be really discouraging. The process of that can be really discouraging. I'm curious if you as an editor, because I know you've probably had to tell writers that before, but what advice just briefly or what would you say to a writer who's right there in that space, who's trying to trust the process, but the process is really hard?

Stephanie:

The process is really hard. It's really hard, and I don't want to downplay that at all. I think it helps to go in first with very clear-eyed expectations. And first of all, more than anything else, define what success looks like for you. I mean, really get as specific and nitty gritty as you dare to, but do your research and think through with clear eyes, "How many books do I think I can sell? How many do I want to?" And you can think about that, too, as, "How many readers do I want to reach? What does success look like to me?" And I think that's really important too, because the tendency is always to stack ourselves up to other writers and other publishing journeys, and that rarely goes well because, again, success for them is going to look different.

And then as far as platform, it's really hard. I have so much empathy for writers who are trying to carve a space for themselves and their readers in the world today. I would frame it this way. I am a strong believer that fighting for your reader starts with building your platform, and it's an act of hospitality. It's a dinner party. You're hosting a table. You want to have a conversation. That's your book. The book is the

conversation. People still have to come to your table to enjoy the meal. So, how are you making space for them? What does your party look like? And also, it's your party. What do you want it to look like? You can decide the theme, the decorations, the menu. You get to decide that and you get to set the terms, and that can be whatever you want it to be.

Stephanie:

Second, I would say you got to do it all in your voice and style. So what sounds like you, what's true to you, what's sustainable to you. Again, you get to decide those terms. And I think that there is also an invitation for creativity in the very real, you'll never hear me discount it, tension of building a platform today. And the invitation is instead of feeling boxed in like, "Well, I'm not going to do that. That's not me. I couldn't possibly, I just don't think it's ever going to be enough," that's language that shuts down possibility. But as writers, we are creative thinkers. We are creative people. The invitation is how can I creatively make a path that is true to me and what I'm trying to do? The only thing that won't get you anywhere is deciding that you can't decide anything and feeling stuck, like, "I just can't." That's going to shut it all down. But there's so many possibilities. How can you make it true to you?

Emily:

Well, listener, if that is a question that you're asking and you are hoping for some practical help, I want to briefly say, and I'll leave more information about this in the outro as well as in the show notes, but for the first time ever, I'm going to be leading writers through an intensive this summer about how to grow your platform without losing your soul. I've never done this particular angle before, this slant, if you will, to talk about growing platform, but I am so deeply passionate about it. And Stephanie, to echo your words, and by the way, y'all, I'm going to wrangle Stephanie in to join me for one of those weeks because I think that Stephanie, you have so much profoundly helpful perspective on this topic.

Emily:

But if you're someone who is watching other writers seemingly effortlessly share their work while you aimlessly scroll and sporadically post, or if you've been told you've got a great idea but your platform's too small, or if you are experiencing the creative confusion that comes from both wanting to share your words and feeling really excited about that, and also wanting to quit writing forever and just get a food truck because this work is too hard, then I hope you will consider joining me this summer. In the month of July, we're going to meet four times live. There's lots of other fun bonuses. It's going to be a smaller group and I am really motivated and excited about talking with writers who are serious about wanting to serve their readers well in a way that feels like you.

Emily:

I'm doing it in collaboration with Hope Writers. You can learn more at hopewriters.com/summer-intensive. That will be in the show notes. But mainly I just want to say, Stephanie, thank you so much for offering your wisdom about that, about trusting the process in general, this whole idea of writing being part of our formation. I just think anything we do creatively, anything we do regularly is going to form us in some way. And so I'm so grateful for all the ways that you have shared your wisdom. I have one more question for you. It is a question I end every show with when I have a guest and that is, Stephanie Smith, what is your next right thing?

Stephanie:

Well, Emily, I just have to say, I constantly find myself using your language of wear your arrows, constantly. It's so simple and telling. So my next right thing. My next right thing is I have recently started dabbling in running. I had this experience just yesterday. I was running. My family and I, we live on the Susquehanna, a couple blocks from the Susquehanna in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. And I was out for a run last night and I had my earbuds in and my music going and I was thinking, "I feel so alive right now," and we all need more things that make us feel more alive. So I was like, "You know what? We're going to do this. In small doses, but we're going to do it one foot ahead of each other." That's one of my next right

things, to keep doing the things that make us feel alive.

Emily:

Amen. Thank you so much for joining me today. It has been an absolute pleasure.

Stephanie:

Thank you for having me.

Thanks for listening to episode 227 of *The Next Right Thing*. I hope this simple practice of trusting the process 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 actually making our lives. As always, you can find me on Instagram @emilypfreeman or online at emilypfreeman.com, where you can also find a transcript of this and every episode.

And you can also find today's guest, Stephanie Smith, on Instagram @stephduncansmith or online at slantletter.com, where you can sign up and receive her wise words about deepening your craft and practicing soul care in the creative life. That's slantletter.com and it's free for all. Finally, if you're a writer who's trying to make a go of it professionally, but you've been told or you already know that your platform is too small to get published, or if you've been doing all right finding readers, but you just feel like a weird and salesy version of yourself, I would love to help you learn to grow your platform without losing your soul. You can learn more about it at hopewriters.com/summer-intensive, but you do not have to be a member of Hope Writers to join us.

This is a standalone small group of writers that I can't wait to work with to help you work through what I call my soul framework. That's S-O-U-L. It's guidance and encouragement to share your writing in a way that feels natural to you and is helpful for your reader, because I've been doing this work for a minute and this tension is one of my favorite things to talk with writers about. It's this important push and pull between the art and the business of the professional writing life. It's something I know a lot about.

My last book, *The Next Right Thing*, sold over 100,000 copies. This podcast has over 17 million downloads as of right now, but none of that happened by me being quiet about this work or doing it all by myself in my office alone. At least that's not all it took. There's a framework you can follow. Not a formula, but a path, and I would love to share it with you and a small group of writers starting in July. The deadline to sign up is June 3rd. It's entirely virtual, and you can go to hopewriters.com/summer-intensive to learn all about the group, the process, the bonuses, the cost, the extras, and the timeline. I hope to see you there.

Well, in closing, here are some words from Stephanie Smith, a blessing for those who fear they won't be heard. She writes, "In the noise, in the motion sickness, in the static of overstimulation, may your anchor ever be that you are seen by God. When you feel the volume is too much and your voice is not enough, may you remember that your first exclamation in this world was a shout of unapologetic being. 'I am here.' May you remember your voice has been with you ever since, and that the breath of God is within you even now, and this is more than enough. May this witness of love have the last word on any scarcity or sense of being forgotten. Amen." Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.