



247: What's Saving My Life (Autumn Edition)

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to the Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 247.

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 information and the sometimes delightful but also distracting hum of entertainment, you're in the right place for discerning your next right thing. Today's question, what's saving your life right now? It's often asked and answered by writers and podcasters alike, and it's easy to see why. It's a simple, direct and deeply thought provoking question. And along with making a list of what I'm learning each season, I also love to every now and then make note of what's saving my life. So, that's today's episode. Listen in.

Well, just this week I finished listening to Barbara Brown Taylor's memoir, *Leaving Church*. It's all about her story of finally getting her dream job as an Episcopal priest and serving a small parish in Georgia, only to realize about five years in that in order to save her own faith, she had to leave the role of priest behind. Now, I've read portions of this particular book of hers over the years, but the last few weeks I listened to the entire book from start to finish. Toward the end, she tells the story of being a guest speaker at an event. The topic she was invited to talk about was an invitation with a simple question. They asked her, tell us what's saving your life right now.

Now because she's the one who tells that story and writes about it, most of the time, the credit for the question is given to her, Barbara Brown Taylor. But when asked, she credits John Claypool, who was once a Baptist pastor and later became an Episcopal priest. That's basically all I can tell from the little internet research that I did. But regardless of where the question comes from, although we'll always point back to BBT, so many of us have carried this question forward. This is true of the best questions. And asking yourself or someone else, what's saving your life right now, well, that could go in a million different ways and it could be answered forever and you may never get to the bottom of it.

Barbara points out wisely that the same could be said for what's killing us. We tend to make those lists mentally all the day long, but what a wonderful way to redeem the day by turning that on its head, all those things that bother us and drive us mad, and asking instead, but what's saving my life right now? Well, here's what's saving mine, the autumnal edition. Here we go.

Number one, first I have to start with the music. It's those autumn playlists y'all. Spotify is saving my life. Two favorite lists is one I made and one from my sister. My sister's is called *I Hope You Like Banjos*. That gives you an idea of what to expect. And then I've been listening a lot to the same list I made last year, but I've been adding to it. I add to it as the year goes by. When I hear a song that reminds me of autumn, I stick it on this list. So the list is growing. That's just simply called *Autumn*. It's got lots of Sam Phillips, Ben Howard, The Wailin' Jennys, the Weepies, and of course our beloved Avett Brothers.

The second thing that's saving my life this season is a color consult that I recently got. I shared about this on Instagram. Listen, I shared a reel about my color consult results from Created Colorful, and that is my most viewed reel of all time. Of course it is. Now, what is a color consult? Well, some of you mentioned on that reel in the comments that you remembered when your mom, or even when you did a color consultation back in the '80s, trying to find out are you a winter, a spring, a summer, a fall? And I vaguely remember that. I feel like one of my aunts did it. But guess what? Wearing your own colors and having your own colors that look great on you, that doesn't really go out of style, but the way we talk about it might.

But at Created Colorful, they say, and this is a quote from the email I got back from them when I did get my color consultation results back, they say, "The goal of analyzing color is to find harmony between the traits that we already possess in our features and the clothes, makeup and accessories that we wear. So when you're wearing your colors, you will be the first thing people notice. Your eyes, your skin, your lips, not your clothes. The right colors for you will neither be underwhelming nor overpower you. They will perfectly highlight you." Now, I want to add to this description that they give of their consultations and say, I don't know that there is wrong and right, I don't know if it's quite so binary, but I think the idea is if you're someone who doesn't naturally know or see the nuances that color can make on your face and skin, then this type of consultation is really helpful.

I'm someone who, I might like a color just of a shirt that I see at a store, but I have no concept of why or how that color may or may not look good on me, except for when people reflect back to me. So for me, I like the extra help of someone saying, "Hey Emily, look at how your eyes change when you're in this shade of red versus this shade of red, or this neutral versus this neutral." For me, that's really helpful. I know that the reality is you can wear whatever you want. We get to wear whatever we want. That is the beauty of being a person in the world. But if you want that extra help as to why does this look good on me or why do I feel really good in this type of color versus this one, then I think Created Colorful does a really good job of pointing out those nuances. And in some cases it's not so nuanced. In some cases, it's real obvious.

If you want to learn more about Created Colorful, I'll put a link in the show notes so that you can find out what they're doing and where to find them and how you can watch some really fun Instagram reels and stories where people learn their colors and you can see the difference that it makes.

Well, here's a third thing that's saving my life this season, and it's my quarterly planning meeting. Now a bit of backstory, back in June, I shared a post on Instagram about how summertime is often a time where maybe a lot of us do this consider, okay, what is it that we're doing? What do we want to be doing? For me, it's almost always informal. It's just an intention that I set. It's usually right before I go maybe spend a vacation with my family. It's just something like in the back of my mind because I'm not working and I'm doing something fun with my family, but it's just something to carry as I go along the way. It's a time that I sometimes reaffirm my own calling to my work or to give language to it in a way that perhaps wasn't there before. And sometimes the summertime is when I rename what I'm doing and why altogether.

Well, back to the quarterly planning meetings. So we do these every quarter. I do it with my assistant, Jenna. She and I set aside a time to get together to talk about the last quarter and review what was working and what wasn't working, and then to look ahead and plan for the next quarter. We do that on purpose. And when we planned this time, we planned ahead. We looked at our one year plan, our three year picture, and our 10 year target. Now this is language that we're borrowing from the Entrepreneurial Operating System, short is EOS, from Gino Wickman's book Traction. Several years ago, I read this book and it's been really helpful in other areas of my life and business. So usually this type of big picture review, the one year plan, three year picture, 10 year target, would be saved for the end of the year.

But Jenna and I discovered that we like planning for my work September to August rather than January to December. So we cheated and we looked at the year ahead here in September. We did it last month in September. And looked ahead all the way through December of next year. And then even way on down the road of what might we want to be true 10 years from now, which is wild, I know, but it is really helpful to just blue sky for a bit.

So why is this saving my life? Well, I've been doing this work since 2008 and in many ways, every season is new, some more so than others. After this year, after a lot of change, I'm standing in a threshold again, and maybe you are too. I think it's helpful to have some plans or at least some targets as we go along the way. Again, this doesn't have to be just for you if you are a freelancer or work from home or even if you own your own business or if you work for someone else. I think this is helpful for really any area of our life where we are wanting to make progress, where we're wanting to reach some goals and do some things to where we can look back and say, "Yeah, that worked," or, "That didn't work so great." So the quarterly planning meeting for me is so helpful for that reason.

And also because, like I said, since I have been doing this type of writing work since 2008, the quarterly planning meeting with a teammate is really helpful for me to feel like I'm not all alone in this. So I think that I realized when we had that meeting ... We did it over two days. We spent the night at the mountain house and did it over two days. I realized just how helpful it was to have someone to bounce things off of, to set some plans and just to have someone else listen as I said my words. And then we wrote them down together, and now it makes it real. And that has been so helpful for me and given me some new vision moving forward.

Speaking of new vision moving forward, a fourth thing that's saving my life is spiritual direction. I've talked about it here a lot, and as you probably know if you've been around, I've been seeing a spiritual director for over eight years, and that has been so transformative for my spiritual life, my life in so many areas. But this year, finally, and I wrote about this in my monthly letter that I send out the end of every month ... And you can sign up for that by the way, if you would like to, we'll put a link in the show notes for you. But something that I shared with my newsletter readers is that this year I finally embraced my own role as a spiritual director. Basically maybe it was late last spring and into the summer, I finally embraced that as part of my work.

It's been 10 years in the making, as my first official training in the practice began in the fall of 2012. When I did that training, I didn't actually intend to become a spiritual director at that time, but I had a deep appreciation for the art and practice of the form. But I have now for the better part of, like I said 10 years or so, have had a, I don't know, a stiff but very well meaning arm, let's say, held out in the face of the spirit declaring that, no, in fact, I cannot be a spiritual director in the traditional sense because of all my reasons and stuff and things and yada, yada, yada.

You probably can relate with this. Maybe not in this particular area, but there's something that you're drawn to, there's some corner of the world that you feel called to show up in differently or fully or for the first time, but you're hesitant. You have all your reasons. And maybe even your reasons make sense, but over time, what I've learned is it's not going to go away. So I decided this year just to face it all the way, and as it turns out, I've realized that most of the work I do already through writing and even this podcast is done with a spiritual direction posture. This year, I finally began to practice it in a more traditional form. I've been doing it for years in other ways, but this year I've actually accepted directees for one-to-one spiritual direction. Now I am currently at capacity, but I do look forward to a time when I can open up more slots in the future for directees.

But so far, I just want to say this practice, both seeing my own spiritual director, as well as offering

spiritual direction, it's saving my life, providing space for paying attention to have someone to co-listen with me when I go see my spiritual director to the ways God might be moving and showing up in my own life. And then to have the honor of holding space for someone else as they discern the same. It's been a true gift, and I feel like I'm experiencing what my friend Phil Anderson has said, that it's a wild and wonderful thing when you bump into someone and realize that it's you.

Another thing that's saving my life is the North Carolina mountains. Ever since we bought our place up in the mountains of North Carolina, I have been falling slowly in love with the North Carolina mountains. It's taken me by surprise because I have always loved the east coast beach. I always will. The sea in the southern part of the United States of America, southeast, I just love it. It's gentle and kind, and I feel like myself when I'm standing next to the water. So the mountains, I've sort of looked at through narrow eyes because I haven't spent a ton of time there. But now that we have a place up there, I am beginning to understand the draw.

Well, that's five things so far that are saving my life. We're halfway there. Here's five more. I've started burning soy candles in the mornings, and I do this in two spots. Number one, upstairs when I'm getting ready in the mornings in my bathroom, I light a candle and I love it so much. And then I like lighting a candle as I begin my work day. So I have two different scents for those two different places. I use soy candles that I get from my local farmer's market, from a vendor there. I like two scents right now. One is pink grapefruit and the other is balsam and citrus.

Another thing saving my life, I think I've had this on a list before, but it's just true, and that is the app Voxer. I remember resisting Voxer many, many, many years ago when I learned about it from Lisa Jo Baker. Shout out to Lisa Jo. I am eating my words because Voxer has changed my life. I do think it's changed my life. It's changed my work life and my personal life. So I use Voxer still on the regular, on a daily basis. I use it professionally to talk with, for example, my literary agent or a couple of writing mastermind groups I'm in. I also use it personally to catch up with my sister or to talk incessantly with Shannon Martin.

You guys, Shannon and I talk so much on Voxer, that when I went to visit her in real life, after not seeing her for eight months or so, I got into her car at the airport when she picked me up, and it was literally like we've just kept talking. It wasn't like, "Oh, hi, so great to see." It was like, "And another thing." That's how often we talk on Voxer, and I love it so much. It saves my life daily.

Another happy little thing that's saving my life right now are some of my little collections. My sister taught me that the best way to display small things is to make them collections all together. Bonus if you can put them behind glass. I'm talking about real things like little tchotchke things that we love. So for example, sea glass that I got on that trip when I went to see Shannon. We went to Lake Michigan and we walked along the shoreline for hours, and I found seven tiny pieces of colorful sea glass, and it's such a little treasure for me. So I put those little seven pieces into a really tiny little glass container I found at the Goodwill. And then I put that inside a small shadow box that I have in my office, and I just love it. I also have a few shells from a trip to Spain from way back in 2003. I also have in that same shadow box with the, it's behind a little glass, some gifts from listeners and readers that over the years have been really meaningful to me.

When I wrote a book about the importance of smallness, it was called *Simply Tuesday*, and I talked about small moment living in a fast moving world, and I shared the story of the benches in my cul-de-sac. I had listeners send me little benches and little tchotchke bench things, and I have a few of those. And then just over the years, I've just collected things I love. In the past, doing that and having them set all around the house can look cluttered. But like I said, my sister taught all of us really that the best way to display small things is to put them all together in the form of a collection. And they're making me so happy right now,

and I thought I would share that with you.

Well, another thing saving my life is a very small thing, but it has been fantastic, and it is a chapstick that you can get at the drug store. It's called Total Hydration. I have it in coral blush, but it's a moisture and tint, so it's both chapstick and color. And not to bring Shannon Martin to every one of my favorite things, but this is the third time I've mentioned her in this episode. She sent this to me for my birthday along with a collection of some other things, and I'm sure she just tossed it in there like, "Oh, this is fun. Toss it in." But it is one of my favorite things, and now I'm going to have to buy it in bulk. Chapstick, Total Hydration, moisture intent. Sorry, I had said the word moisture, but it was necessary to share with you the very chapstick I get so that you can get it too. It's wonderful.

Well, the final thing that's saving my life right now, especially this autumn season, is the act of celebrating. Like you, I'm in the midst of some endings and some really exciting beginnings, and I have found that it's really important for me to celebrate them, no matter how small. John and I toasted before dinner to a new beginning. We took our son out for ice cream at the news of a good grade. I went to Goodwill to celebrate finally knowing what my perfect shade of brown is and searched for a sweater in that color. I found one, by the way. And then we said yes when a friend offered to celebrate with us after we heard some good news. We said yes when they offered to have us over for a cookie and a cocktail. And we said, "Yes, we will welcome you into our lives. We will step into yours when you invite us to come." Finding small ways to celebrate is a gift to me this season. I'd say definitely it's saving my life.

So there you go, 10 things saving my life right now. I wonder what's saving yours? I encourage you to name what's saving your life, but not to overthink it. Just pay attention as you go along the way. Make note of the gifts, profound and simple. My prayer for us is that grace will continue to surprise us kindly as we do our next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 247 of the Next Right Thing. Well, I hope this simple practice of naming what's saving your life 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 that our daily decisions are actually making our lives. As always, you can find me online at emilypfreeman.com, as well as on Instagram at Emily P. Freeman, and when you go to emilypfreeman.com, you can also find a transcript of this episode, as well as every episode we've ever done. Thanks to Leah Jarvis who does our show notes and our transcripts for us every single week. And as always, a special shout out to the team at Unmutable who edits every episode for us. They do such faithful and wonderful work, and I'm super grateful for them.

In closing, a word from Barbara Brown Taylor herself in another book she wrote called *An Alter in the World*, which I also love. Here's what she says about what's saving her life. "What is saving my life now is the conviction that there is no spiritual treasure to be found apart from the bodily experiences of human life on earth. My life depends on engaging the most ordinary physical activities with the most exquisite attention I can give them. My life depends on ignoring all touted distinctions between the secular and the sacred, the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul. What is saving my life now is becoming more fully human, trusting that there is no way to God apart from real life in the real world."

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