



275: 3 Questions and 3 Books

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to The Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 275.

This is a podcast about making decisions and 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 I'm thinking in threes. Three categories of reading, three books I recommend, and three questions to help you reflect on the last several months before heading in to the new season that's upon us. Listen in.

Well, I've been laughing out loud at some of the videos that I've been seeing lately, particularly ones that are rooted in the month of May. One is where Jami Nato pretends to be the school, calling to remind you about National Mammal Awareness Week.

"Hey, bestie. Okay, it's May, so that means early release every other Thursday. This week is National Mammal Awareness Week, so we are going to dress up as our favorite mammal. You pick, get creative. No school on Fridays except for one. It is Miss Smith's birthday, so everyone's going to make her a trifold card. Bring that in on Thurs. Looks like cafeteria's closed for the next 10 days. Bring an allergy-friendly sack lunch daily. Okay, bring back the recorder we loaned you in September..."

When she tells us to bring...

"... or pay a hundred American dollars via wire transfer."

"Bring back the recorder from September and if you don't bring the library book back," she says, "we will call the police." And anyway, She lists a million other celebrations, graduations, awards day, field day, things that are happening this time of year. We know it, we've lived it and we want to sleep through it. By the way, for more hilarious videos, follow Jami Nato, J-A-M-I N-A-T-O on Instagram. You will not regret it.

Well, as my kids get older, I'll offer a bit of comfort. It's true that May will not always feel like you're running late to the dumpster fire, but little comfort that might be right now. So, this week I wanted to offer you a bite-sized bit of inspiration in the form of three books and three questions. If you like this concept, you'll be glad to know it's inspired by the free letter I send out on the final day of every month where I always include the three books I'm reading and three questions for reflection.

The Next Right Thing with Emily P. Freeman

For our purposes here in this episode, I'll share with you three books that could be good reads for this time of year. One for each category that I'm usually reading from, which I'll share with you, they are... I almost always have a book going in the spiritual life category. That's one. And then the second category, I usually have something going in, is personal or professional development. Sometimes that is faith-based, sometimes it's not. Sometimes that personal professional development is something that's more like business related or writing related, something like that. And then the final category is fiction or memoir.

Now, I don't read from these three categories every single day. It's not like I'm always reading all three of those morning, evening, and night. But I usually have at least one book in each of these categories going that I can grab depending on what time of day it is, when I have time to read. So, if it's the morning time, then I will grab the spiritual life book that I'm reading. If it's the afternoon, I'm like, "I'm going to have an afternoon cup of coffee," which I rarely do, but when I do, I might grab that personal professional development book in the afternoons. Also, if it's Saturday and it's an afternoon, I'm probably not going to read my morning book, I'll probably read my afternoon book, like the book of writing or whatever. Or if it's the evening time and I'm like, "Oh, I'd like to read." I'm not going to grab a professional development book in the evening. Absolutely not. I'm going to grab fiction or memoir the way the Lord intended.

So, if you're in the middle of May, and if you've got your eyes set on summer like I do, or if you are in the Southern Hemisphere, I guess that means you're in the middle of fall? Is that how that works? You've got your eyes set on winter? Regardless, probably, maybe these would be better books for warm weather. Some of them it's not going to matter. But here's three books I recommend, one for each of those three genres.

First, spiritual life. This one, it doesn't matter about season. But this one is a book I've read a couple of times, it's called *Jesus and the Disinherited* by Howard Thurman. In this book... It was published in 1949 and in it, theologian and civil rights leader, Howard Thurman writes about his own experience advocating for non-violent responses... Or a non-violent response to oppression. It's a very short book and I have read it a couple of times and it's one that I want to return to again and again because to be honest, one read isn't enough to digest Thurman's brilliance, and I'm not being hyperbolic here. Truly, I think he is a brilliant human. His first chapter on Jesus is one of the most stunning commentaries I've ever read about the life of Christ. So, that's one book I would recommend as a morning reading. It's very short so it probably won't take you very many mornings. But if you haven't read it, I say it's a must-read.

A second book I recommend, one that could fit really nicely in your afternoon, is a book by author, Shannan Martin. It's called *Start With Hello*. It came out last year. This isn't a business book and maybe you wouldn't call it "personal development," but to me it kind of fits that category. It makes a great afternoon read pick for me. I think Shannan is one of the best writers we've got when it comes to taking big systemic issues and giant questions of how we move around, live and make decisions in the world, and then excessively placing them in time and space like in our very own neighborhoods. So, she takes examples from her own life, but also... Questions we're actually asking. She makes them real.

And she is able to write in a way that we can all see ourselves in her writing. I call Shannan a "sidewalk poet" and an "everyday prophet." And I think in this book she issues a stunning invitation for us to live as neighbors in the world, teaching us on every page what it actually looks like to be human together. As it turns out, Shannon says this a lot, "There is no them. There is only us." And this is the book we want and need to help us find our way back to each other. I think this one is particularly timely for the warmer months because it's talking about neighboring, and it's a time when we might more naturally see our neighbors out and about. And it's a great book to get our minds set for that time of year.

Finally, third book I recommend. This is one I read many years ago by writer Kate Morton, and it's called

The Lake House. She's written several good ones. The Lake House is one of my favorites. The description online, this is a quote says, "Living on her family's idyllic lakeside estate in Cornwall, England, Alice Edevane..." Wow, am I saying that right? Anyway, "Alice is a bright, inquisitive, innocent and precociously talented 16-year-old who loves to write stories, but the mysteries she pins are no match for the one her family is about to endure." That's about all I'm going to tell you about it because I'm someone who doesn't like to read book jackets, so I won't tell you anymore.

But Kate Morton is a favorite fiction author of mine, and I also love her book, *The House at Riverton*, that's bonus book. But this one, *The Lake House*, has several of my choice elements of great fiction, a main character who's a writer, clever suspense, an old house with a story. I love old houses with stories. And an ending that stayed with me days after I finished the book. You're welcome. Well, these are three books I love and could be good friends to companion you through the end of May and into the summer.

Now, as we move into a new season, I'll leave you with three questions and a bit of time to reflect on the season you're living through as you perhaps prepare to move forward to say goodbye, to let something go, to open something up, or to close something down. So, if you're able, wherever you are, settle in and give yourself the gift of a few solitary minutes to consider your answers to these three questions.

Number one. In the last few months, what's something lovely that has happened that went uncelebrated? Perhaps it was something quiet and personal, maybe obvious, but was missed somehow. Maybe it was lovely only to you or a big deal for reasons you can't explain. But think back over the season of March, April and May, and see if you can name a moment that meant something, a day or an ending or an accomplishment. Bring it forward now and consider what it might mean to celebrate it after all.

Number two. What's something you needed more of this season? Maybe you didn't realize it when the season began, but now that you look back, you're thinking that maybe you had too much of something and not enough of something else. So, what was that something else? What did you need more of this season?

Number three. What's one thing you learned this season? It doesn't have to be serious or sacred, but it could be both, of course. Think back over your traveling, your work days, your school days and relationships, your commitments, your calendar, your family rhythm. What's one thing you learned? How might you carry that forward into the next season? The best teachers for future decisions are the decisions we've already made, and the simplest way to access those decisions is to develop a practice of reflection. One good thing about reflection, there's no wrong answers. There's only you, taking some time to consider what's true, who you are and who you are becoming as you simply do your next right thing in love.

I hope this simple practice of three books and three questions can be just one more rung on the trellis upon which your rhythm of life will 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 on Instagram @emilypfreeman and online at emilypfreeman.com, where you can also find a transcript of this and every other episode.

If you like this practice of three recommended books and three questions for reflection, I've got good news. This was kind of the live version of my monthly letter. I send out a new set on the last day of every month, a new set of three books I'm reading and three questions for reflection. To get it, all you have to do is sign up at emilypfreeman.com/letter and you'll receive this month's letter on the last day of the month.

A special thanks to the team at Unmutable who is always faithfully editing these episodes, as well as to Ashley who is always keeping me organized and all my Next Right Things. She has our show notes and

helps with other podcasty related things. Thank you, Ashley.

Well, in closing, a few words from one of the recommended books, *Start with Hello* by Shannan Martin, where she's giving us simple ways to live as neighbors, which is welcome advice as we head into the warmer months where we'll more naturally run into them. So, here's a short invitation from Shannan from her book, *Start with Hello*.

“In the context of my beloved place, the south end of our block holds my strongest ties. I've made it my mission to know the names and faces of the people who live in the seven houses closest to us. At least two of these are inhabited by people who prefer to keep their distance. Honoring that preference is our way of loving them. Though our relationships vary, there's something special about knowing, on even the most basic level, who we are. As people come and go, I've learned to get scary intentional. I no longer leave it up to my scattered memory. Now I track them via an email sent to myself titled, you guessed it, 'Neighbors'. If you've lived in your place for a long time and worry it's too late to expose what you should know, take a deep breath, walk over with a snack to soften the blow and simply begin by saying, 'I'm sorry, I should know this by now'. They won't think you're strange. They'll think you care. Afterward, race home and write it all down. You're one step closer.”

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