



277: One Question to Ask Yourself Every Quarter

I'm Emily P. Freeman, and welcome to the Next Right Thing. You're listening to episode 277. 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, I'll share that one question to ask yourself at least every quarter. Listen in.

I am calling this episode One Question to Ask Yourself Every Quarter, but of course you can ask it more often than that. I always have this question in mind actually, and it's become such a part of my rhythm of life that I don't really even think that much about it in one particular time. I just think about it as I go along my way and record my answers as they come. So what's the question? You probably already know it's, "what am I learning?" Asking myself what am I learning is a more accessible version of Oprah's, "what do I know for sure?" What I know for sure feels like a final draft, whereas what I'm learning is more of an on-the-way process question. Here are three places to look if you're just beginning or need a refresher to practice the art of recording and remembering what you're learning.

Number one, pay attention to quotes you underline, highlight, or save, and when I say quotes, it could also be Instagram captions or things people say on a podcast. Anything that catches your eye that you mark, highlight, underline, or hit save on. For example, one thing I learned in last quarter that I highlighted is from Hillary McBride's book, *the Wisdom of Your Body*. She wrote, "Trust is a process, not an event."

Now, this might be something I know in general, maybe it's part of the ethos of the air around us that we kind of know it, but there's something about when someone says something succinctly that I can quote, write down, and remember, it's worth recalling and paying attention to in my list of what I learned so that I can apply it to daily situations in my life. That particular day, at that particular time in my life, the last three months, I've been thinking through this idea of trust and somewhat being a little bit impatient with myself because I recognized I was doubting myself in a couple of areas, and then I read that quote and it helped me to cultivate some self-compassion.

Trust is a process, not an event. Once I wrote that down, I was more aware of other places where this theme or concept was coming up. In our last episode with Taylor Elise Morrison, she said, "It's hard to trust someone you're not in relationship with," and the context of her saying that was she was encouraging us to cultivate a relationship with ourselves, not to the exclusion of our relationship with God, not to the exclusion of our relationship with anyone else, but in addition to those relationships. So just that one quote, trust is a process, not an event has helped me be more self-aware in other areas of my life in other conversations I'm having, so that's one area you can pay attention to. Number two, pay attention to your areas of strength. What do people come to you for advice about? It could be meal planning, parenting,

organization, what to say yes or no to. It could be decorating.

Chances are, there are things people come to you with, questions that they have about all of those areas, about theology, about business, about finance, about, I don't know. There are tons of things that people might ask you about and the reason why that's a great area to pay attention to when it comes to what you're learning is if people are coming to you to ask you advice about a particular area of life or business or faith or whatever it is, chances are that's something that you are good at naturally and it's probably something you enjoy, which also means you're always paying attention to that area of your life subconsciously or on purpose, and you're always learning about things about that area and you might not even realize it. What if you decided to go ahead and record those things as they come to mind?

For example, I'm a writer. I write for a living. I write for myself. I get paid to write. I've taught writing conferences. I love it except for when I hate it, but that's another conversation. But because of all those things, I get asked about writing a lot and I'm always learning about writing. For better or worse, sometimes I'm aware of what I'm learning, sometimes I'm not, but something I've learned about writing recently is, again, it's not necessarily new information to me, but I'm learning it from a different angle and what I'm learning is how my process for writing an Instagram caption is different from writing an email is different from writing for this podcast.

What is the difference you might ask? Well, that's something I'm paying attention to so that I can articulate that to and for myself and to and for Ashley, who's my content manager, because it's important for her to know how my writing process works to the extent that she's able to so that she can do her job, but that's not something I've ever had to articulate before. I've just done it. So you can see this one small example of I'm learning that about myself, something that was subconscious and instinctual. I'm learning how to pull it forward and to maybe put it into English words. I haven't gotten there yet, I'm working on it, but that paying attention to what I'm learning in an area that I'm good at and skilled at can be beneficial in my life and my work, and the same can be true for you.

Well, a final area you can pay attention to if you're wanting to cultivate a practice of recording what you're learning, recalling what you're learning is, number three, pay attention to your habits and your routines and how they're changing. You likely have routines that you engage all the time, daily, weekly, monthly. If one of those routines changes for any reason, someone moves in or out of your house, it's a different season, different time of year. You've got a new job or a new responsibility or you've left or entered a new community. When we change our routine or our rhythm on purpose, it's usually in service to something we've learned.

For example, for the first time ever this year, I waited until the end of January. I mean, I may have waited that long before, but this is the first time I remember doing it on purpose. I waited until the end of January to write down goals and priorities for the year. Now, in the past, I would do this at the end of December, or at least at the very beginning of January, but this year I learned because this is a process of reflection and strategy and goal planning that I deeply enjoy, if I try to cram it into an already busy time of year, that was not serving me anymore. I did do that for years because that was kind of the most logical time that I could think about the year to come was in those two weeks or that week between Christmas and New Year, but that wasn't serving me to think about the whole year.

Instead, I realize and have named, I like the leisurely stroll through my Next Right Thing guided journal from the year before. I like to collect and curate what I've learned in the last 12 months, and then also to have time with John in January once. The twins have gone back to college, once Luke is back in school and we have more time together during the day or even on the weekend or whatever to talk about some of those goals, to think through them after we've gotten through the festivities of the holidays and we have some early birthdays in January, so we've gotten past all that and that way waiting till the end of January,

we have a time.

There's no pressure to kind of cram all in and get started right away in January. That's just not my speed. It used to kind of be my speed, but it's not anymore. So I had a habit change and when I paid attention to why I learned that about myself and paying attention to what I'm learning and to how my habits are changing is one way to help me name that. In my monthly letter, I'll share my list of some specific things I've learned in these last few months and I'll tell you how to get that in a minute, but for now, here are some prompts for you to consider some things you've learned in the last three months.

Consider the most recent book or podcast that you've read or listened to. If you were to write down one takeaway, what would it be? If you're on Instagram or Facebook, go back and review some of the posts you've recently bookmarked or liked. Do they have anything in common? Is there something there that made you go, "aha," but then you promptly forgot about it? Go back and review those and consider what they have to teach you. What's an area that you continue to be interested in or particularly inclined toward? Is it something that your friends or family continue to seek out your perspective on? What is it and is there a theme or a set of themes emerging in that area lately for you?

Do you have a habit or daily routine that has recently changed? Can you trace it back to when and why? What's true now that wasn't true before? Consider the people you love, the relationships you hold dear. Is there anything about them that you've learned lately? A personality quirk, a like or dislike, a nuance you didn't notice before? What about a quirk, like, dislike, or nuance you've learned about yourself?

If nothing comes to mind in any of these categories, be kind to yourself. Consider writing down the question, what have I learned or what am I learning and carry it with you for the next few weeks. Ask God if there's anything you need to know, something you need to see or believe or remember. And as you go along your way, may the Lord bless you and keep you as you do your next right thing in love.

Thanks for listening to episode 277 of the Next Right Thing. I hope this simple practice of naming what you're learning 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 on Instagram at [emilypfreeman](#) or online at [emilypfreeman.com](#) where you can also find a transcript of this and every episode, just click on the word podcast at the top of the page and navigate your way to episode 277.

A big thanks to the team in Unmutable who edits the audio for the podcast and to Ashley on my team who does our show notes and other tech things and is continuing to try to decipher my own creative process. As I said before, developing a habit of recording what you're learning may not come natural at first, which is why it could be helpful to see what other people put down on their list. I share a list of some of the things I'm learning every quarter in my free monthly letter, which you can get on the last day of every month at [emilypfreeman.com/letter](#). We'll link to that in the show notes. This one for this month goes out in a couple of days, so be sure to get on that list before the last day of the month. Well, in closing, here's a word from American philosopher and educator, John Dewey, who says, "We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience." Thanks for listening, and I'll see you next time.