

# SUMMARY

## *THE NEXT RIGHT THING*

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# **Summary of “The Next Right Thing” by Emily P. Freeman**

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Learn how to make a habit of making the right decisions.

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# Introduction

Have you ever experienced something called “decision fatigue?” Chances are, we all have, even if we didn’t know there was a name for it! Decision fatigue occurs when you’re simply worn out from all the decisions you have to make every day. And, let’s be honest-- as adults, we are constantly faced with an overwhelming amount of decisions!

These decisions can be simple things, like which pizza place to order dinner from, to more complex choices like moral and ethical dilemmas. But no matter what your quandary is, decisions surround us every day, all the time. And if you have a family, the amount of decisions you have to make grows exponentially! Now, you’re not only deciding for yourself, but for your partner and children as well. As a general rule, by mid-morning, the average working parent has already decided on her and her child’s morning routine, both of their wardrobes, breakfast, and schedules for the day-- and it’s not even 11:00 am! Is it any wonder many of us experience decision fatigue?!

Our decision fatigue can grow even more burdensome when we’re faced with complex choices that weigh heavily on our minds. We wonder if we’re making the “right” decision or if we’ve chosen the option that won’t hurt or offend anyone. It can all get extremely stressful and even take years off our lives! So, over the course of this summary, we’re going to take a look at the author’s tips for making good decisions and how you can turn good decisions into a habit.

# What's Your Next Right Thing?

As we begin this chapter, let's pause for a moment. Evaluate your life. Consider the current trajectory of your career, relationships, and emotional and mental health. Where are you headed? What path are you on? And where do you want to be? You may not have solid, clear-cut answers to those three questions at the moment, but that's okay! The important thing is that you ask those questions in the first place, because that's how you'll discover your "next right thing." Put simply, your "next right thing" is simply the next step you should take in your life. It's the one that will be most right for you. But how do you know what's right? Well, in the author's experience, her next right thing came in the form of a calling to go to grad school in her forties. But at first, she couldn't tell if that was the best decision for her future or a sign of a midlife crisis. So, she kept turning the idea over in her mind and considering all the pros and cons. And at the end of the day, she was left with the simple conviction that this was something she needed to do.

She didn't have any big reason for it, like the possibility of getting a promotion or a better job if she went back to school. The circumstances of her life were not in any way forcing her to do so and she didn't feel as though her life would be empty and meaningless if she neglected to pursue this goal. But she did feel like going back to school would help her grow as a person and a writer. Conversely, however, she feared that her new commitment might be too demanding. What if it took away from the other facets of her life, like her job, her marriage, and her family? What if she became overwhelmed and couldn't handle her responsibilities? What if this was a bad decision and it opened the door for a string of bad decisions?

And as she contemplated these worries, that's when she realized that she was going about her entire decision-making process in the wrong way. Rather than evaluating her choice solely on the basis of whether or not it was right for her, she was worrying about the outcome. She realized that not only was this not constructive, it was actively preventing her from

pursuing her next right thing. So, with this attitude in mind, she took the leap and decided to stop trying to control the future. And as it turned out, going to grad school was the right thing for her! It did make her a better person, encourage her to grow, and call her to cultivate her faith relationship. And that's how she knew it was her next right thing.

# Become a Soul Minimalist

The author has learned that this step is vital for discovering your next right thing. That's because her personal experience has shown that distractions contribute to decision fatigue. Because our brains are overloaded from the everyday chaos of our lives and because we live in an age of digital distractions, we're often unable to focus long enough to give anything our full, undivided attention. As a result, it's not surprising that we feel overwhelmed by the pressure of decisions. If we could concentrate long enough to truly think about our problems, we would probably come to a faster and more beneficial solution! And that's why the author wants to encourage everyone to become a soul minimalist. Just as you might "Marie Kondo" your home, de-cluttering to remove all possessions except the essentials which bring you joy, a soul minimalist does the same in their head and heart.

However, Freeman cautions us to remember that her brand of minimalism isn't quite the same as our traditional idea of the practice. That's because she's not advocating for the emotional equivalent of blank spaces and empty drawers; it's not about having space just for the sake of having space. Instead, "soul minimalism" concentrates on cleansing your life of all the things which don't add value. Put simply, if something doesn't make you happy, make you a better person, remove it from your life. A variety of things can fall into this category, so be an equal opportunity purger when it comes to relationships, responsibilities, and feelings. For example, the author acknowledges that you are not obligated to stay in a friendship that drains your energy or makes you feel terrible about yourself. You are not required to be emotional support for someone who takes advantage of you or fails to appreciate your sacrifices.

Removing the distractions of these pressures is a great way to unburden your life and free your mind! And the same is true of eliminating digital distractions. For example, you may find it freeing to turn off social media notifications. The author tried this as an experiment and found that it

drastically improved her peace of mind! It worked because it allowed her to dictate when she engaged with social media instead of feeling bombarded by the pressure to check notifications right now. Because although we may not realize it, it's easy to get overwhelmed by the need to check your messages or see how many 'likes' your new post has gotten. And before we know it, that pressure can rule our lives and steal our peace. So, try disabling your notifications and see if it makes you feel as though you've gotten your life back.

## Name Your Narrative

This is another important step because it's yet another thing that distractions steal from us. If our heads are engaged with Instagram likes and Facebook notifications-- along with the responsibilities of our jobs, children, and partners-- we don't have space in our minds to even access a moment of clear and uninterrupted thought. As we've seen in the previous chapter, that lack of thought can be toxic, and that's especially true when mental clutter prevents you from engaging with a practice that the author calls "naming your narrative." Naming your narrative is helpful because it allows you to put a specific label on the feelings that you are experiencing right now. Rather than feeling lost or overwhelmed in the chaos, you can simply say, "I feel this way because I'm afraid."

That label can then help you decide what you want to do about it! The author found that this could be a helpful tool for decision-making, even if that decision was a small one. For example, when she found herself getting overwhelmed by the pressure to choose "the right plant" during a shopping trip at a gardening center, she used this tool to take a step back and re-evaluate her situation. In so doing, she realized that at the core, she was scared. She was scared of choosing the wrong plant or finding that she wouldn't be able to make it grow. And in her fear, she allowed the decision to balloon until it reached magnanimous proportions and became a much bigger deal than it really was.

But as she went through the process of unpacking her feelings and naming her narrative, she was able to accept the freeing power of this exercise and achieve mental clarity. So, try naming your narrative, and don't be afraid of the story you'll find! You may be scared or conflicted or angry or sad, but that's okay. Naming those feelings will help you work through them. It will also help you remember that these feelings are only temporary and that you don't have to dwell on them, no matter how scary they seem.

# Be Honest With Yourself

The author has learned firsthand that being honest with yourself is critical for identifying and pursuing your next right thing. Although we don't always intentionally lie to ourselves, there are times when we're not quite as diligent as we should be in fleshing out our true thoughts and desires. Sometimes it's easier to let things lie under the surface and avoid confronting the negative reality of things we would rather not feel. However, the author observes that we have to investigate these feelings, whether they're good or bad. Because until we truly know ourselves, we can't decide what our next right thing is. So, start by asking yourself what you truly want and how you truly feel. If you run into negative feelings that upset you, that's usually a sign that, for one thing, you haven't acted on them, and secondly, you also haven't worked through them.

So, take the brave step of confronting those feelings and ask yourself what you really want. For example, maybe you're angry with someone who wronged or betrayed you. Maybe, in your heart of hearts, you really want them to suffer as badly as you did. But even though that desire is understandable, it doesn't sound very nice, so we often suppress thoughts or feelings that strike us as uncharitable. So, instead of doing that, allow yourself to feel what you're feeling and don't be afraid to name your narrative. Admit that you're angry and give yourself the freedom to process that feeling. Remember that it's okay to be angry as long as you don't act on destructive impulses, so go ahead and let yourself write out what you're feeling or tell Jesus all about it in a prayer. Either of these acts can be cathartic and help you process unwanted feelings. The author has learned that cultivating a deeper understanding of your feelings-- and connecting that knowledge with your faith-- can be very helpful for furthering your relationship with Jesus. So, don't hold back on spiritual growth just because it might be a little uncomfortable!

You can also improve your quality of life by making what the author calls a "life energy list." A life energy list is exactly what it sounds like; it's a way of

pinpointing the circumstances that are either increasing or depleting your energy in life. So, think back over the past three months and take note of the things that made you feel alive and the things that left you feeling drained. For example, maybe volunteering at the homeless shelter made you feel electric with purpose. You could tell that you were doing something meaningful and positive and that knowledge made you feel great! By contrast, however, visits with your emotionally manipulative mother-in-law might leave you feeling drained and guilty for existing. You might even find yourself feeling so tired that you struggle to accomplish daily tasks!

These examples are clear indicators of energy sources in your life, so take a closer look at your own circumstances and identify your own energy sources. Once you've done so, you can check this knowledge against your analysis of your thoughts and desires, and ask yourself about the motivations that drive your life choices. For example, do you host elaborate dinner parties because you really enjoy decorating and cooking and you want to bring joy to your family? Or do you do it to show off and prove yourself to your mother-in-law? Identifying these factors is beneficial because it will enable you to move forward and make decisions with greater clarity.

## Final Summary

It can be tough to make decisions and the chaos of the modern world only adds to the pressure! Fortunately, however, you don't have to live a life that's overwhelmed by decision fatigue. By providing a few simple and spiritual strategies for making good decisions, the author seeks to encourage readers to move toward "the next right thing" that's waiting for each and every one of us.

If you want to find your next right thing, it's important to start with some simple introspection, learn to become a soul minimalist, name your narrative, and be honest with yourself. If you can practice these strategies in conjunction with your faith relationship, you can further your understanding of God's will for your life, and cultivate a joyful and more simplistic life.



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