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It's 2021, and we have a lot of hopes and dreams that things will be better. But one of the things that stayed good in 2020 despite everything is my reading life, all thanks to Book of the Month.

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#191 - Naming What Matters in 2021

Hi there! You're listening to The Lazy Genius Podcast! I'm Kendra Adachi, and I'm here to help you be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. Today is episode 191 - naming what matters in 2021. We did it. You guys, we did it! The calendar is officially set to 2021, and now we look ahead at all the possibility, all the fresh starts, all the hope. But it's also still 2020 in some practical ways - our kids still might be at home, there's still not a vaccine for the majority of Americans if you are in fact living in America (I see you, listeners from England and Australia and Thailand and such). Basically like we said a couple of weeks ago, the turning of the calendar doesn't change everything, but it does change something. It changes our outlook, even the tiniest bit. We are no longer in one of the hardest years, if not the hardest year depending on your life experience, we've ever faced.

So today I want us to start small in our own lives where we are and think through what is going to matter to each of us in 2021. One of the most common questions I get is how to actually name what matters. Like, what if you don't know? What if you want to apply Lazy Genius principles to your life, things like house rules and scheduling rest and building the right routines, what if you want to use those but don't know where to start since we always start with what matters? That is what we will do today. We will figure out how to name what matters, especially in 2021.

A few weeks ago, I was listening to one of my pastors during our Longest Night service which is a service of lament on winter solstice, and he used the phrase "a universal kinship with sorrow."

It jumped out at me because it feels so desperately true. We have a universal kinship with sorrow, and leaving a year that brought a universal kinship with sorrow feels significant. There is still sorrow around us without question, but for me, 2021 holds almost a universal kinship with hope. If we don't have hope for what is in front of us, we'll just keep drowning, not just in the sorrow but in the schedules and cancelled plans and unknown futures. We have to have hope, and I do think 2021 is uniquely positioned to offer some. So let's enter into that on purpose.

How do we know matters?

Last year, probably more than any other year, has been a crash course in what matters. We've had to cling to the good we can find, to the systems that sometimes work, to the daily and nightly rituals of an ordinary day. Many things that we have love, things that mattered before 2020, were lost last year and might still be. But without reflecting on those things, it's hard to really name them well. Basically, we can't know how to look forward unless we're also looking back.

I've always struggled looking back. Many of my personal realizations about what matters have come through conversation or an invitation from someone else to figure it out. I don't always do it well on my own. One person who has offered many invitations to do that over the years is Emily P. Freeman. If you're new around here and haven't heard me mention Emily before, she's in my real life but is also a fantastic author of *The Next Right Thing*, a book that offers a simple, soulful practice for making life decisions. She also has a podcast by the same name that I highly recommend. Anyway, when Emily wrote *The Next Right Thing* and started *The Next Right Thing* podcast, I was so happy for everyone else who got to read or hear a taste of how she's helped me think through things over the years, how she's asked questions to help me figure out what matters. When my intuition, something I lean on a lot, isn't speaking up and offering an answer, often a look back does.

But again, I'm not great at looking back on my own. I always need some help, so if you're like me, there is good news for you. Tomorrow, Emily is releasing a *Next Right Thing Guided Journal*, a simple soulful way to look back so that you have better info on how you want to move forward. I love to help you move forward and create systems around what matters to you, but if you're struggling to know what does actually matter and want to develop a practice of noticing, *The Next Right Thing Guided Journal* is your absolute best companion. When Emily told me she was writing it, I was all caps excited like when is this available please and thank you. Now that I've held it in my hand and started using it every few days or so, it's already added clarity in places where I'm not quite sure what matters. So there's that. That's your first step. Get Emily's *Next Right Thing Guided Journal*.

Okay, so after you begin a practice of looking back in whatever way works for you, there is a very simple, customizable path to naming what matters, and it happens with three questions: what could matter, what does matter, and what matters most? Essentially, you're narrowing down your possibilities. If you try to just pull one out of the air, it likely will not work well because it feels like so much could matter. Which is true! So rather than fight it, we start with it.

What could matter to you? This is where you write all the things down. Anything that feels like it could matter belongs on the list. Again you already probably know a good bit of what matters to you simply because of how we've had to live this past year. What has kept you afloat? What has made you feel like a person? What did you long for? What do you still long for? Name those things. Name what *could* matter using 2020 as a guide.

Another way that you can name what could matter is by thinking categorically. What could matter in your body and soul and mind? What could matter in your home? What could matter in your planner? What could matter in your kitchen? What could matter in your relationships with any number of people? What could matter in your creativity? In your work? In your free time? Some of us think better by niching down and getting specific, so write down anything that comes to mind, anything that could matter, in any category that feels right.

That's our first pass, our first question. What could matter?

Next question, what does matter? Now that you have a list, start crossing some things off. You'll know what to cross off because they just don't matter as much as other things on the list. This is harder for some than others, mostly because a lot of us have expectations and even shame in certain areas. You might think that a home-cooked meal every single night should matter, but maybe it just doesn't to you. But you feel weird about that, like something's wrong with you. But listen, maybe this isn't a season for home-cooked meals. Maybe you haven't yet learned some foundational skills to cook dinner on a regular basis, so forcing yourself to be proficient at something you're new at just makes you feel bad about yourself. Basically if you find yourself saying "well, that should matter," just pause a moment and ask why. Ask why that should matter.

Some things should matter, even if they're hard. Should in and of itself is not the indicator that you should ignore that thing. The work of anti-racism and racial redemption in our relationships, in our churches, and in our systems, all of that comes to mind. Reading books and listening to podcasts on difficult topics, having hard vulnerable conversations, attending city council meetings, these are not things that we're probably super jazzed about at any given time because they take effort and should. They should take effort. The word should isn't always bad. It's just important to ask why you're saying it. I should care about being a loving citizen. That does matter to me. Will the small steps to focus on that be as easy as saying that reading for fun matters to me? Probably not, but that's the beauty of being a Lazy Genius. We get to decide what matters to us and then take steps to support it. Sometimes those things are difficult or weighty or not super fun, but that doesn't mean they don't matter.

The shoulds I want you to watch out for are cultural shoulds, gender construct shoulds, performative shoulds, earning your worth shoulds. Those shoulds generally don't serve you, so all I'm asking you to do as you eliminate what doesn't matter as much as some other things on your list is to pay attention to when you say the word should. It's not an automatic pass, but it absolutely deserves attention. We all have some things that we are in the process of letting go,

of releasing the power of that “you should do this, you should care about this.” Says who? Says who? Sometimes the who matters, and then you can continue the work of narrowing down what does matter.

Alright, we’ve named what could matter, what does matter, and now you can choose what matters most. If you’ve eliminated and separated a handful of things that really do matter, you have a much smaller group to pull from. Now does that mean that whatever matters most gets rid of the rest? No, not at all. But having that top thing helps you make better decisions. Every single time. The focus on that one thing feels like a strong limit that’s restricting you from living, but in reality, it’s making it easier to live and giving you guardrails and easy yesses and nos, it helps you set boundaries and protect your margin and know when to focus on something and when to let it go.

You cannot be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don’t without naming what matters most. One of the principles from my book *The Lazy Genius Way* is to go in the right order, and the first step of every order for everything is to name what matters. You will feel more grounded and purposeful and alive and even productive because you’re not trying to do everything and make everything matter. You cannot make everything matter.

So with your culled list, with this handful of things that do matter that you’ve named, circle the thing that matters most. Again, you can have something that matters most across a couple of categories. You know, what matters most for yourself and your own kindness and care and honoring of yourself, what matters most in your family, what matters most in your work, that kind of thing. You can name that. You can have more than one thing that matters most because our lives are made up of a variety of responsibilities and relationships and all of it. But in each category or however you want to do it, have one thing that matters most so that everything falls into place more easily. The direction is clear.

To put some personal context around this, I’ll share with you what matters most to me in 2021 and how I named that. So I have felt this past year a lot in my body. I haven’t slept well, I have had a lot of soreness, I’ve been unkind to myself on more days than I would like about the shape and size of my body. I’ve really grown to respect and appreciate and even love what my body looks like now which is very different than what I would’ve considered as ideal a few years ago, but the messages that we have lodged deep within us and that we hear and see all around us makes it tough sometimes to tell ourselves the truth. So yeah I’ve had some days of unkindness towards myself or days where I had to work really hard to believe the truth. That’s very normal by the way. I also noticed that my care for my body is so directly related to my thought life and the health of my soul. Everything is connected, and I definitely tend to put the care of my body at the end of the line which directly impacts other parts of my humanity, of who I am. So in noticing all of that, I started to read and listen to and just pay attention to good, solid, kind words about embodiment and care for myself, and I landed on the phrase “honor my body.” I want to honor my body in 2021. In my personal life, that matters most. It’s already begun with just asking myself at the start of the day and throughout even “how can I honor my body today?” By focusing on today, I can name what I need that day based on rest and my schedule and my

hormones and the health of my relationships and all kinds of things that impact how my body is feeling. And I'm ending the day by asking "how did I honor my body today?" And writing that down, naming it. That daily ritual of the asking and the writing has already made a big difference. But what that does, by naming that as something that matters the most for this particular year, it allows me to let go of things that dishonor my body. And that looks different every day. Honoring my body could be how I feed it, how I move it, how I rest it, how I think about it, how I dress it, and all of those things will change from day to day. I'm not creating rules of how I think my body is honored. I'm being present with the question because honoring it matters the most. How I do it is secondary.

Another thing that matters in 2021 and this more in my home and relationships and even here in my work is joy. Joy matters in 2021. Finding, experiencing it, and sharing it matters most. 2020 had so much sorrow, and even though joy can exist alongside sorrow or right after or right before - the two are not mutually exclusive - I want to focus on things that bring me and my family and my people joy this year. On purpose. With intention. At the expense of other things. It's just one year, and joy matters to me most in 2021. I will let many other things go to keep that a priority. So that might mean taking the long way because it's prettier, saying yes to ice cream in the middle of the day because my kids would think it's so fun, not letting my plants die so I can experience how much joy they bring, all kinds of things.

So those are two things that matter to me, and they have already given me such a clear lens to look through with more intention and without adding a lot of extra stuff to do. Really, it's made life simpler. I'm not adding new tasks or new things, new routines, new habits to a life that's already going. Thinking about the analogy of a train, it's not like I'm piling more cargo onto an already loaded train. I named where I'm going, what matters most, and I got rid of all the cargo and will keep getting rid of cargo that I'm not going to need. It just gets in the way. So this way of thinking is incredibly freeing and doable and practical and soulful and all the things. This is why I love not just the book *The Lazy Genius Way* but the actual Lazy Genius way. We need system and soul. We need both. We're not robots. We're not amebas just trying to survive with no structure around us. It's not either or. It's both. But you can't have both in a nice comfortable relationship when you try to make everything matter. It just doesn't work.

So this week, I'm going to give you a little homework assignment. I wish I could come up with a cooler name than that, but I want you to go through these three questions: what could matter, what does matter, and what matters most? You've heard a lot I'm sure about a word of the year and obviously we know a ton about resolutions and all that language that the start of a new year brings, and going through this process might actually give you some clarity on what your word is if you want one or what a resolution or a goal is if you want one. You can't really decide any of those things without first naming what matters most, and this process, while incredibly simple by definition, is a worthwhile way to spend your time. And if you are really struggling to know what matters because you haven't been looking back or would like some help in figuring out what gives you energy, what gives you life, what decisions are preoccupying your thoughts, grab yourself *The Next Right Thing Guided Journal*, too. It will give you so much direction for this upcoming year simply by helping you pay attention.

Thank you for spending a few minutes with me today, and I'd love you to see you this week on Instagram if you don't already follow me there. I'm @thelazygenius. Also, if you're listening to this on either January 4th or 5th and you live in the Triad area of North Carolina, Emily and I are going to be hanging out in a Target parking lot for anyone who wants to come and say hi or get a book signed or just wave while you're picking up your diapers and bananas. All the details will be on my Instagram account @thelazygenius and Emily's @emilypfreeman. You might remember that when my book released last August, I ended the launch day in a Target parking lot with Emily, so tomorrow on her launch day, we're doing the same. Hope you can come say hi!

I appreciate you all so much, and thank you for listening. Until next time, be a genius about the things that matter and lazy about the things that don't. I'm Kendra, and I'll see you next week!