

## Week 37: When You Think You Don't Know How You Want to Live

I'm drying dishes and putting them away when I see it once again.

I open a cabinet door, place a cup on the shelf, and I notice the unopened Star Wars video game nestled next to a stack of cups. I think to myself, "I really should do something with that video game." I close the cabinet door. And then I stop. The video game was given to Aidan at his sixth birthday party. We already owned it so, amidst the chaos of the party, I'd decided to toss it in the cupboard and figure out what to do with it later.

Aidan's sixth birthday party was *five years ago*.

For five years I've opened the cabinet door, noticed the game every time, and then closed the door again, telling myself I should do something with the game. It's a silly story when it's about a video game. But it's not such a silly story when we do the same thing to our passions and our dreams.

It's not unusual to walk through our lives with a vague sense of disappointment. It's not unusual to wake with a nameless gnawing in our minds and it's not unusual to return to sleep with an uneasy sense that something important was missed. We wake up and we do it again and our lives become a question lived: "There must be something more for me, but how do I figure out what it *is*?" It's not unusual to ache for more and not know what the more is.

Except we *do* know what the more is.

It repeatedly arises within us, and we repeatedly shut the cabinet door upon it. We know we want to reach out to that old friend and apologize for errant words or thoughtless neglect, but we shut the door on it. We see a tender feeling about our lover traverse our hearts, and we want to reach out and put it into words, but we shut the door on it. We have a book we want to write or a painting to paint or a business to start or a charity to join or a job we want to apply for or a social injustice we want to stand up against, and we shut the door on it. We have places in the world that have been calling out to us for as long as we can remember—the green hills of Ireland or the Black Hills of South Dakota or a beach where we're reminded who we are or a wooded path we once walked as a child—and it makes no sense but something inside of us is telling us that we need to walk it again.

And we shut the door on them.

We glimpse—out of the corner of our mind's eye—what will heal us or elevate us or send us or resurrect us, and we get in the habit of telling ourselves we'll do something about it someday. And then five years slip by and we're aching for more but we've forgotten what it is. The answer to our ache is as simple as listening to our hearts again. Instead of shutting the door on them.

When I was in the first grade, my family moved to a different state. Upon arriving, I made a best friend so quickly I can't remember living there without him. I recall a lot of uncertainty and fear, and I recall he and his family were like a lighthouse during a time I was lost at sea. After three years, my family returned to my hometown, and I never spoke to him again. Over the years, I thought about him often, wondering where he was, what he was doing, and wishing I could reconnect with him. And then about five years ago, it occurred to me, evolving technology would now make it *easy* to find him.

Over the next five years, I shut the door on the urge every time it arose.

Until two months ago, when I finally entered his name into a Google search, and within moments I was staring at his face on LinkedIn. The next day, I wrote him an email. He wrote back. Our email exchange was a brief one. We filled in the gaps in our memories, updated each other about our lives, and traded pictures of our children. There were no huge surprises, except for one: a heaviness had been lifted from my heart. The nine-year-old kid inside of me who just missed his friend wasn't missing him anymore. My heart had known what it needed and, after five years, I stopped shutting the door on it and finally listened.

Sometimes, joy is simply undone things finally lived.

We need to keep the door of our hearts open, so we can listen to our urges and our wants. Many of them are trying to lead us into joy. Yet, when we've been shutting the door on them for so long, it can be hard to break the habit and keep it ajar. Maybe our grade school teachers were on to something when they taught us the "Five Ws" of information gathering: who, what, where, when, and why.

Who do you want to reach out to?

What do you want to do with your life?

Where do you want to go?

When will you let yourself listen?

Why not now?