

Week 38: What if a Resurrected Life Isn't as Impossible as It May Seem?

On a Saturday afternoon, my wife was in a car accident.

After the police and paramedics and tow trucks, we returned home and I left messages with all the appropriate agencies. I went to work on Monday morning and by the time I arrived home Monday night, I had five voicemails on my home phone from various agents, saying they would try to reach me again the next day. The same thing happened on Tuesday, and I wondered how I would ever connect with these people while I was at work.

Frustrated, I decided to change the outgoing message on the home phone, instructing the agents to call my cell phone. So I opened the voicemail setting on the iPhone that had served as our home phone for about six months, and I went about recording a new message. On an *iPhone*. (momentary confusion) My home phone is an *iPhone*. (dawning awareness) It's an iPhone and it isn't attached to a wall or a base station. It can go, literally, anywhere. (giddy wonder) My home phone can go to work with me! (exultation!)

Sometimes the simplest, most elegant, most life-changing solutions are right in front of our noses. But we can't see them, because we are locked in to old schemas. A schema is a mental framework that helps organize and interpret information in the world around us. Schemas are the lens through which we see everything, and they are necessary and good. They allow us to make quick calculations—to get to certain conclusions—without doing the same mental work every time. A strange man leaning out of his car window offering a little girl a candy bar is a schema. Schemas are essential when we need to act quickly and decisively.

But schemas can also be a problem, because sometimes they're outdated. Like my home-phones-are-attached-to-a-wall-and-must-stay-at-home schema. It's a stored set of rules that no longer applies. Or worse, some of our schemas were never correct in the first place. For instance, skinny is beautiful, to be loveable I have to keep everyone perfectly satisfied with me, success is defined by the size of my bank account, I'm a good parent if my kids are happy, other people get to decide my worth, rainy days are bad days.

And the biggest problem with schemas is they are *powerful*. So if they're outdated—or if they were never correct in the first place—they actually keep us disconnected from reality. They limit our freedom and undermine our creativity. When we sense something more in ourselves and we yearn for life to be bigger, schemas are like shackles on our hearts.

They are like non-existent phone chords tethering us to imaginary walls.

These months of living can be life-changing for us. Because during these months, we might all look in the mirror and stop seeing ourselves as old rotary dial phones tethered to outdated or false ways of seeing ourselves and the world around us. And the secret to making this quantum leap might lie in two little words and one little question: What if?

What if, instead of staring at the numbers on the scale, we tossed the thing in the garbage, and threw away our self-loathing with it? What if we can't be everything to everyone and that is still good enough? What if it isn't our job to keep everyone around us happy? What if we really are free to *choose* a family, rather than remaining bound to a biological family that wounds us every time? What if we don't have to remain even one more day in an abusive relationship? What if some rules really *were* made to be broken? What if we don't have to stay in a career we've loathed for a decade? What if we canceled our cable subscription and used the free time to live something we believe in?

Several years ago, I began to discover the power of this question, when I asked a few what-if questions of my own. What if I started a blog, even though I've never written a word? What if therapists don't have to be as opaque and hidden as I've always been told? What if I transformed a bunch of blog posts into an eBook about marriage? What if I began to work on a full-length book? What *if*? And here we are.

You are reading the companion to my first full-length book.

But it hasn't been easy. In fact, at times, it's been excruciating. Blowing up schemas is scary—there's all sorts of learning to do and almost no guarantees anything will work out the way we want it to. But that may bring us to the most important what-if of all: What if our plans *working* out is not nearly as important as our hearts *coming* out?

What if truly living is always a little terrifying?

C.S. Lewis wrote, "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." What if we quit settling for making better mud pies in the slum? What if we began to receive the infinite joy always being offered to us? What if we decided to set out for a holiday at the sea? What if we started to ask ourselves, "What if?"

Maybe, just maybe, we'd cease to be half-hearted creatures who are far too easily pleased. Maybe we'd become whole-hearted creatures untethered from the walls of our lives, living with freedom in the world according to the desires planted by love in our heart of hearts.

What if?