

Week 44: The Beauty of Being a Quitter

My wife and I had reached a pinnacle.

We'd just had our third and last child, my wife had become the director of her graduate psychology program, my clinical practice was thriving, and we'd just purchased a house in the right neighborhood with the best schools. We had *arrived*.

Before long, though, we realized the place we'd arrived was like a hamster wheel. With a motor. That couldn't be turned off. We had a mountain of debt, mountains of responsibility, and mountains of stress. We had worked tirelessly for two decades to get to the top and, upon arriving, we were greeted with this disappointing news:

There *is* no top.

Slowly, it dawned upon us: you don't find peace by reaching the peak of all good things; you find peace by *getting* a peek at the good thing you've always been. You don't reach happiness by climbing; you settle into happiness by settling into who you truly are.

We wanted to make changes, but there was no room for change to happen. We sensed a different life around the corner, but our corner was too cluttered to catch a glimpse of it. Sometimes, life gets too cramped to move in any new direction. Sometimes, the direction we need to go is *backward*.

Sometimes, the best thing we can do is to *undo* the best things we've done.

Around the time my wife and I were wondering how to exit from the road upon which we'd been racing, I heard Bob Goff speak at a small conference in Chicago. I remember it was jump-out-of-your-seat inspiring, but I can't recall any specifics, except one. He said if you want new things to come into your life, you have to cut out old things. It was a Thursday, and he said he quits something every Thursday. On the way to the conference, he called a board of directors upon which he served and told them he was quitting. When they asked why, he told them: It's Thursday.

For my wife and I, Thursday had arrived.

It was time to become quitters.

Of course, few of us have Bob Goff's freedom to make such sudden and radical changes to our lives. *We* certainly didn't. So our Thursday lasted six years. It was a series of slow, small, and subtle changes that amounted to a little bit of breathing room. We changed our lifestyle and paid down debt as quickly as we could. We watched for the steady drip-drip of activities that were draining our time and resources. We cancelled our cable subscription. I stopped obsessing about the news

and quit arguing about politics. I have no problem with news and politics, but they were leaving me with no room to turn around.

The same was true of our many obligations and commitments. So, I identified my five roles—husband, father, friend, therapist, and writer—and I said no to anything that didn't fit into those five roles. My wife eventually stepped down from her administrative position. I eventually reduced my caseload by fifteen percent.

We made space.

While making space in our lives, we often don't know what we're making space *for*. We just know we're going back to the fork in the road. And, years later, when we finally get there, we find a pleasant surprise waiting for us at the fork. We find *ourselves*. And then we have the space to realize, we knew what we wanted all along. We find the room to settle into who we are and the freedom to shape our lives *according* to who we are. In the words of a friend, we can finally live the way we're wired.

Is your clock ticking toward Thursday?

Are you ready to make space?

Are you ready to quit something so you can start something?

Are you ready to start being *you*?