

Week 46 Practice

Our practice this week will build upon the practice from the last two weeks. More specifically, as you are increasingly thinking about the activities you want to subtract from your life and the activities with which you want to replace them, there will likely be one particularly troublesome category of activities.

These are the activities you are good at.

For instance, my wife was a skilled academic—she received many accolades for her teaching, research, and administration. Because she was good at it, it was easy to assume she was meant to be doing it. In other words, we tend to use “skill” as the sieve through which we sift our lives. If we are good at something, it stays in the sieve. If we are not good at it, it passes through. When my wife started using a different sieve, her choices become clearer. Her new sieve came in the form of a question:

Does this activity lead to consolation or desolation in my life?

In other words, does living this activity fill me up, make me feel alive, and produce joy in my life—or does it drain me, make me feel dull, and produce sorrow and resentment? While she was very skilled as a professor and she enjoyed many aspects of it—especially the mentoring—this question helped her to become aware that it was mostly a desolation. In contrast, her work on the side, providing care directly to children, was a consolation in her life.

Where are you remaining engaged in activities in your life because you are skilled at them, even though you experience them as a desolation? This week, take some time to list the activities and commitments in your life that you committed to because you were skilled at them. Next to each, write “consolation” or “desolation,” based upon the criteria described in the last paragraph.

By the end of this week, begin to consider how you can reduce the amount of time you dedicate to your desolations and increase the amount of time you dedicate to your consolations, regardless of the level of skill you bring to each. And remember, no need to do something radical like finding a new job as my wife did (unless you want to). But do choose activities you will enjoy making a daily or weekly habit of.

Life is too short to let our consolations pass through the sieve.