

## Week 46: You Aren't Here to Be More Happy (You Are Here to Be More You)

Once upon a time, my wife was the recipient of her college's Junior Faculty Achievement Award, a symbol of a promising academic career in bloom. It was awarded for excellence in research, teaching, and every other skill of the academy. She hung the placard on her office wall. She went on to run international research projects, head her graduate program, write a textbook, and mentor twenty-four students through their dissertations, amongst countless other achievements, both large and small.

Seven years later, shortly after reaching the summit of the academic life—tenure—my wife resigned from her professorship, in order to work in a small, rural health center, providing services to families who need help but usually can't get it. Her decision, on the surface of it, was perplexing at best and crazy at worst. I've tried to explain it many times, but this is the closest I can get:

She got a little closer to knowing who she is.

Of course, it would be easy to say, "Hey, we finally figured out who we are. That old thing wasn't us, but this new thing is." Life doesn't have an easy setting though. Remembering who you are isn't an all-or-nothing endeavor. It's not a black-and-white thing. It's not a pass-fail assignment. The truth is much closer to this: life is like a sieve and everything we do runs through it. If we watch closely, we'll notice passing through the sieve all those things that aren't really us. And we'll notice, captured in the sieve of life, the parts of us that are who we've always been.

Why did our family make such a radical move? I think my wife and I just shook our sieve long enough to want more of what kept staying in it. We watched our life long enough to desire more of who we already are.

After all, the point of life isn't to be more happy; it's to be more *you*.

During her last week of classes as an academic, my wife's students presented her with a painting of a tree, and it was captioned by a quote from one of her most important spiritual mentors, Henri Nouwen: "When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand."

When my wife shook her sieve, the trademarks of a professor—advice, solutions, and cures—passed through, and what remained was her warm and tender hand, with which she wants to touch the wounds of the wounded and share the pain of the world. Her academic office was in one of the most important buildings on the campus of a prestigious college in one of the most affluent towns in the country. Her new office is in a rescued building reclaimed by an unproven health center in a small,

out-of-the-way town in rural Illinois. On the wall of her new office will hang the symbol of who she is—a drawing of a tree and words about wounds and tenderness. And packed away in a closet at home will remain the symbol of who she was—a junior faculty achievement award that passed through the sieve.

The point of life is to be more you.

If your heart has always been drawn to the white-capped Rockies but you spend every day designing computer chips in Silicon Valley, then you are ignoring the parts of you caught in the sieve. You are postponing the joy of being you. On the other hand, if you've been tinkering with computers since the crib and have always dreamed of working in the tech industry, but you are stuck leading hikers into the mountains every day, then you too are ignoring what's in the sieve. You too are postponing the joy of being you.

Follow your heart.

Start by listening to it.

You can trust it.

It wants to lead you back to you.