

Quitting Time

Many of the people who come to me for counsel have shared their secret fantasy of running away and leaving everything behind, starting over in another country, culture, or relationship. Can you relate? “I want to quit my life,” one man told me. “I’m sick and tired of everyone sucking the life out of me without putting in anything in return. I want to disappear and never look back.” To this man and others, I usually point out the obvious: you might leave the circumstances behind but you’ll never escape yourself. Those who have “quit life” end up no happier than those who stick it out. The cast may change but the script usually stays the same.

Before you quit anything—your job, your marriage, or your life, I encourage you to think about why you want to leave and where you want to go next. If the trapeze artist must relinquish her hold on the swinging bar in order to catch the next bar coming her way, then we must have a clear perspective on what we’re releasing and what we’re moving towards. We’re doomed to repeat the past if we don’t examine our prior choices.

Too often, we have quit the wrong things at the wrong time. We have relinquished the dreams that would have sustained us on our journey in favor of the dreams of others. Pleasing our parents, conforming to others’ expectations, and taking the most convenient opportunities that come our way will eventually catch up to us and lead us into a season of slow-burning rage and inverted depression.

On the other hand, maybe we have been so afraid of change that we now need to quit something in order to make room for the next season of our lives. You may need to quit your present job, relationship, or church situation in order to make room for the next career, person, or fellowship. For most of us, we often dig our own ruts in life through a stop-start, start-stall style of decision making in which we vacillate between our boredom with what we have and our fear of future uncertainty.

Before you quit anything, you should look within and seek to determine your real motives for such a severance. Are you settling for less than you’re worth? Staying in a relationship because you’re afraid to be single and alone? Keeping a job that’s beneath you because it’s too tough to change careers at your age? Resigning yourself to the mediocrity of the present because of the fearful uncertainty of leaping off the cliff of your future?

The only way to know is to examine your dreams. The secret to making powerful decisions throughout your life is often the difference between keeping your dreams alive and settling for a walk-on part in someone else’s dream. Before you quit, it’s time to revive those unrecognizable longings that have been languishing with freezer burn deep in the bottom of your heart.