



Life, in the way of life

THE SWEATSHIRT SEEMED OUT OF PLACE. It had been 91 degrees that afternoon, which wasn't sweatshirt weather, so I really didn't want to put it on, but the cool evening air against my skin warned me resistance would be futile.

I'd grabbed the shirt out of a drawer and darted back toward the deck, stopping in the kitchen for my dinner plate. Heading out the door, I high-stepped over Skip, my sister's dog, and successfully made it to the table without spilling anything, nor dropping the sweatshirt.

"Brrr, it's chilly," I said, slipping my right arm, and then my left, through the sleeves of the sweatshirt, and pulling it over my head. Only an hour earlier I had been driving home from work with the sunshine drilling through the windshield, searing my left arm, and overwhelming me with heat. But now, as the sun was blocked by the neighbor's trees, and was dipping lower in the sky, the heat was gone and a kiss of cool permeated the air. It was there: that realization that hits mid-to-late August, that summer is rapidly slipping through your fingers and fall is chasing you down at a breakneck speed.

That feeling always brings a bit of panic with it. I see Labor Day weekend not just as a few days casually sprinkled across the pages of the calendar; rather, I see it as a roadblock, similar to the concrete barriers they put up to stop traffic from driving down a street. Labor Day is a cutoff that stops summer in its tracks.

As Labor Day approaches, I'm usually just getting into the swing of things with summer. Then suddenly, just when I thought I had lots of time to do what I wanted to do, I'm faced with the reality that there isn't much time left.

We're surrounded by beautiful lakes here, and I fully envisioned myself spending a quiet morning on a dock this summer, rocking on the gentle roll of the waves as I sat silently and listened to birds calling out across the water to one another, and the soft lapping of the water against the shore. I haven't even dipped a toe in one of the local lakes this summer. Not one single toe.

Whether it is fitting in a trip to the lake, or making the big decisions that loom over us in life, too often we do with life what we do with the summer: assume there is plenty of time, until we realize it is fleeting and we haven't done what we've dreamed of.

We walk such a fine line in life. We have overwhelming and serious responsibilities, but we can't let these cares, worries, demands, tasks and obligations keep us from living the life we desire to live. Simply put, don't let life get in the way of your life.

I have a well worn business card size inspirational picture that I got as a child in Sunday School, and which I still have today. With its bent corners, soft creases and faded letters, I use it as a bookmark, which I put to use almost every evening. I don't know who originally wrote it, but the words rings true and remind me of where to put my focus. It says:

I was regretting the past and fearing the future. Suddenly my Lord was speaking: "My name is 'I AM'." He paused, I waited, He continued: "When you live in the past with its mistakes and regrets, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I was. When you live in the future with its problems and fears, it is hard. I am not there. My name is not I will be. When you live in this moment, it is not hard, I am here. My name is 'I AM'."

Too often, we worry about the future, to the point of being unable to enjoy today, while it's here. And too often, we get so wrapped up in the tasks, demands, expectations of others and of ourselves, and the great to-do list, that we forget to live the lives that are playing out in front of us today. When the tasks are too difficult, the burdens too much and the schedule too full, we feel like we are going insane. If only we can get things under control, and if only we can get through the next few months of work and obligations, then there will be a light at the end of the tunnel, right? Right ... ? If only we can work hard enough to control and organize everything, so that there are six green lights, giving us the guarantee that everything will turn out okay and we'll have an obstacle-free drive down the road of life.

The problem is, there are never six green lights. There is never a respite from the tasks and challenges, and there is never an empty to-do list. And frankly, if ever the to-do list was empty, the tasks and challenges were met, and the six green lights did line up, it would take so long to get there that, most likely, it would be too late to live the life you wanted. You would have let life get in the way of your life.

As we enjoy the last days of summer and anticipate the approach of fall, my challenge to you is to embrace, enjoy and experience the life, opportunities and people who are in your world. In the wise words of Charlie Brown, "In life it's not where you go – it's who you travel with." So grab the ones you love—and who love you— while you can. Traveling with them through life will ensure there's someone who loves you and respects you by your side, there to help you through all of life's challenges and joys. And they'll keep you warmer than a sweatshirt!

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