

A 3-step Guide to Giving Up

Wait. What? Aren't we supposed to *just do it, go for the gold*, hustle, commit, and never give up? Well, kind of. I am not an advocate of sitting around waiting for your ship to come in. Or not committing to your responsibilities and goals. But what I do think is necessary is that we give up a few things before we can ever start, follow through with what we may have begun, or reach any potential that we were born with.

■ Give up on Perfection

Maybe you've heard a lot about perfectionism. How it's a dangerous thing, and how we have to reject it in our lives in order to move forward. Or maybe you're still repeating the age-old adage of practice makes perfect. I like the newer idea that practice makes progress. Because perfectionism will kill progress. I'll give you an example.

When I was a little girl, I used to "play the piano" on any given object. I would make up songs and sing about pretty much everything in my life. I started taking real piano lessons at a pretty young age and continued off and on as my parents could afford it. I had a good ear for it. In fact, I would fudge my way out of actual practice for my parents, but my piano teachers would always know. I just wanted to play the music of my heart without being tied down to quarter notes and cumbersome staves that fenced me in. But within the music theory I called confinement was a wealth of knowledge that was untapped in my early years. So I begged to begin lessons again as a pre-teen. And I did. But this teacher was the harshest one yet. Snapping my hands with a ruler as they would collapse on the ivory keys of our 50-year-old piano, and repeating the mantra of practice, practice, practice. Because, after all, practice makes perfect!

Finally, after nearly two years of agonizing pain, my fourteen-year-old heart could take no more. I wanted to play basketball instead. And my lessons conflicted with the sports schedule I embraced. Sure, I continued banging out the sounds of my soul on my beloved yellowish upright, but my skill never progressed. It died with the idea that I had to be perfect to move forward. I later went to college with the intent of studying music education, but within weeks realized that I would never measure up given my level of knowledge. Or so I thought. It would have taken a lot of hard work, but I could have learned. After all, isn't college for learning? But I didn't get it. I sat paralyzed by my belief that practice makes perfect, and I hadn't practiced my craft in a perfect way probably ever. Those many years ago, I would have had to give up the idea of perfection, but it was a lesson I wasn't to learn until much later in life.

I won't give you a lot of how-to's in my writing. I don't know if what worked for me will work for you, but what I will do is ask a lot of questions. So, here's one I ask myself still.

What are you willing to be imperfect at as you seek to make progress, believing it is part of why you're here?

What do you plan to do about it?
Baby steps, folks.

I cannot tell you that my dreams of becoming a musician are well in the works, or that I am now proficient at the instrument that gives me such comfort in emoting my daily feelings. But I am willing to be imperfect at it. To sing and play to my heart's content and improve as I ask questions of what the songs of my heart have to do with my every day life. Because there isn't a day that goes by without the music of the wind giving me a melody that I long to share. Except when there wasn't. A time in my life when the music died, and I felt lonely and dry. Maybe I'll tell you about it sometime.

Secondly, I'd like us to focus on what we are and what we are not. I'm sure that you've been called many things in life. Like it or not. Some names we've been given are false. Ugly, unloved, failure, not good enough, worthless. If any of these stones have been hurled your way, I hope you can hear a voice today that tells you that's not true! Because I'm saying it. Those are not for any human being. We are created for a purpose and have intrinsic value. Do we make mistakes? Sure. But we aren't the sum total of our failures. Shed those lies and focus on the things that make you who you are. But don't put too much stock in it. Because things change. People change.

■ *Give up on Titles*

I know. Declare what you are, and believe in yourself until you become what you declare. Absolutely. I agree with the statement of: "Don't fake it until you make it; believe it until you become it." But I also think that there's another thing you must give up in order to do that. Give up on titles. Or at least give up on the notion that titles are what we're striving for.

Our world is run by corporations and businesses that maintain the proverbial ladder we've been told we must climb. Titles matter. Words are weighty. Even I had to call myself a writer before anyone else began describing me as such. But what I had to give up was the idea that my title defines me. Or that I am worthy or unworthy of it. What if I had to stop writing because my life took an unexpected turn that required more time than would allow continuing my profession? Are all of the years I spent teaching in a classroom without meaning because I no longer wear that title? Of course not. Those titles don't define me fully. They are only a piece of who I am. I could list many titles that would describe myself. I am a composite of many things. And so are you.

❖ List your titles

❖ Which ones are you going to focus on making progress in?

My suggestion is to pick 2, and go for it. Don't try to improve every hat that you may wear. Maybe it's time to list them all and cut a few that you wear simply because that's what someone else wanted you to do, but you know they just suck your time, and keep you from making true progress. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

■ Give up on Expectations

I know what you're thinking. That's irresponsible. And maybe I could've chosen a better word, but for me, this rings pretty true. I'm not saying to shirk your responsibilities. I'm a wife, a mom, a daughter, sister, aunt, daughter-in-law, friend, and the list could go on, as I'm sure yours could. I want to show up for my people. Do what is expected of those roles. But not always.

From the time my middle child was about twelve, he has been doing his own laundry. He's a very pragmatic individual who came to me and said "Hey, mom. Can you teach me how to use the washer? I want to have a shirt for tomorrow and I know that you don't do laundry until Saturday. Also, I think it's unfair to expect you to have the exact clothes I want washed when I want them, so I'd like to do it myself." Why, of course! Love it when logic works in my favor! And so I showed him how it all works.

What's funny is that his older sister soon asked him to show her how to do it, and proceeded to follow in his footsteps. So, when my youngest was twelve, I taught him the wonderful art of laundry. After all, his siblings had been doing it for years, and it just made sense. But he's the baby, and he expected to have mommy do it until he moved out of the house. The problem was that I had taken a new job and was working well over the amount of hours that I had in the past. I couldn't keep up with laundry for myself some weeks, let alone, that of a sweaty teenage boy! So, a normal expectation of a parent taking care of laundry became an "I can't do that for you right now, but I can teach you how to do it for yourself" point in my list of parenting expectations. Can I say that today my teenager always does his laundry in a timely fashion? Um, no. At least, not my youngest. But it gets done, and he learns to take care of himself. And when I get the chance, I help him out. But the expectation is gone. Appreciation stepped in. When I have a week where I can spend a few days around the house and I happen to include his laundry, he tends to give me extra loving affirmations of "Mom, thank you for helping me!" And "You're the best mom ever, you do so much!" That wasn't even my goal or what I thought would happen by simply including his stinky stuff with my own (sorry, had to say it), but it was a positive outcome of what had turned from expectation to appreciation.

And lest you think that a partnership was ignored and daddy didn't step up, I have only recently started doing my husband's laundry after I offered to do so since I am blessed to be able to work from home again when I want to. And it's a chore I actually enjoy. Most days.

I think that clearly communicating what you can and cannot do in any relationship is paramount to giving up certain expectations. I didn't just stop doing my son's laundry. I taught him how to do it

himself. He never protested or threw a fit, but he didn't just embrace a methodical practice of laundry completion. However, in what was a new rhythm of life for us, we both knew what was expected.

Maybe you've said yes to a good many things in your life simply because people expect it of you. Not real-life duties, but those extras that are draining you. I think you know your list.

Let's take a moment for the positive first so that if you start giving up, you'll know what to pour your time into afterward.

What expectations in your life in are filling you up?

Which ones are draining you?

Who do you need to communicate to about an expectation you need to give up?

If need be, how can you partner with them to help them fill a need that you are no longer able to?

There's a difference between expectations and responsibilities. As a parent, I owed it to my son not to leave him high and dry. Ha. Get it? Laundry. Anyway, if you have a responsibility to help someone do for themselves what you cannot be expected to do, partner with them for success on both sides. If you have said yes to being swim coach and party planner and PTO coordinator and classroom volunteer, and booster club treasurer, and need I go on? Give them fair notice, recommendations if appreciated, and give it up.

On to progress.