

I Quit

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It was while I was an exchange student in England during college that I became a committed follower of Christ. From that moment on I wanted to put Christ first in my life and my life verse became Mark 8:34, “If any person would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me.” Little did I know at that time though how much built-in denial of self there is in pastoring, in parenting, and in being married.

While in college I also met Pete and we were friends for several years. We eventually fell madly in love and got married. Inside of our wedding bands is psalm 34:3 – “Glorify the Lord with me and let us exalt him together.” We looked forward to a life of service and with that in mind, the night after Pete finished seminary, we were on a plane going to Central America to learn Spanish. Pete’s vision was to plant a church in NYC but we wanted to learn Spanish first, which we knew would double the impact of our ministry in NYC since there were so many Spanish speakers there.

After almost a yr. in Costa Rica., I came home a little ahead of Pete who got home the night before the birth of our first daughter. We found an apt. in the NY Times and moved to New York City to begin planting the church – just the 3 of us – there were no other people.

The next 8 years seemed like a whirlwind. I remember going, going, going constantly. Having small children, doing a lot of reaching out to our community, trying to recruit staff who could help us, training people for leadership, the daily running of the church, running Sunday services, preparing sermons, dealing with conflicts, constant hospitality in our home, and dealing with crisis in people’s lives were just a “few” of the stressors in our lives. During that time period we also had 3 more children and planted a Spanish speaking congregation. We were now one church in 2 languages and Pete was pastoring both congregations.

I gradually grew very, very weary physically and emotionally. Pete was over here loving people and I was over here loving people but we weren’t doing a very good job of loving one another. I felt very much like a single parent. As a matter of fact I remember saying to Pete “You know if we got separated my life would be easier because then you would at least have to take the kids on the weekends.” I remember having feelings of anger, sadness, and disappointment, for how hard our lives seemed to be. I also had shame for having those feelings. I would just try to ignore them and hope they would go away. Then that life verse would pop back into my mind. “Geri, just take up your cross and follow Christ.”

Or I’d think of that acronym J-O-Y, Jesus, others, you. I remember praying a million times, “Oh God renew to me the joy of my salvation...” – because it had gotten lost. I would sometimes hint to Pete about my unhappiness (because I was too ashamed and guilty to be direct with him about my unhappiness – which I saw as weakness) but he

would justify our out-of-control lifestyle with, “yeah, but we are doing this for God and it won’t be forever, just until we really get the church established.”

At the same time I was having all these feelings, and amidst the chaos of the church, the church WAS growing with people committing their lives to Christ for the first time, and others were having their lives significantly changed for good. This was a very confusing time because on the inside I was feeling pretty badly but on the outside I was witnessing a lot of great things God was doing in peoples’ lives.

I realized we were “gaining the whole world but losing our own souls.” I finally got to a point of such misery I made a decision and said to Pete, “Pete, this church no longer brings me life, but death so I’m leaving the church.” So I quit our church and started going to another church!!!!

Me quitting the church put us into a bit of a crisis. We knew we needed help to sort a lot of things out. We wanted to get wise counsel about all the problems in our lives – such as the exhaustion of we believed everything out there was the problem such as having small children and church planting, church planting in NYC, and just living in NYC. What we would come to learn was a real eye opener. Although all those things I mentioned were exhausting they were NOT the real problem. We found out that the problems were not out there, they were in us.

I learned, that although I had quit the church, there were other things much more important and significant for me to quit to begin addressing the problems in my life.

1. I quit being afraid of what other people thought of me. Fear of what others thought of me was the main reason it took me so long to unentangle myself from so much of the nonsense that went on. When I realized I was losing my soul, and I didn’t even recognized myself anymore, I finally quit being afraid of what other people thought of me.

2. I quit lying to myself, to Pete and to God. Pete and I became brutally and respectfully honest with ourselves and with one another and finally with others. I finally admitted to myself I was miserable, even though good Christian pastors’ wives “shouldn’t” be miserable.

3. I quit being a ”good” Christian pastor’s wife. Which meant for me that I was no longer going to ignore what we sometimes call the negative emotions. I was going to pay attention to all my emotions. No emotion was now off limits, which for me previously had been sadness, anger, disappointment, hurt, shame. All of which I had. I was just ashamed to admit I had.

4. I quit dying to the wrong parts of myself. God never called me to die to the things I love and value such as the outdoors, silence, solitude, my extended family, intimacy with myself, intimacy with my husband but I had died to a lot of those things. I kept denying myself in such a wrong unhealthy way. There were also parts of me that needed to be put to death. I did need to die to defensiveness, criticalness, need to be right, and fear of

vulnerability and weakness. I just needed to figure out what was it that I was supposed to die to and what was it that I wasn't supposed to die.

5. I quit blaming Pete and took responsibility for my life and my happiness.

Something happened when I got married. Unconsciously I had given over the responsibility of my happiness to Pete and I blamed him for a lot of my unhappiness during those first 8 years. I now know he wasn't responsible, I was. No one is responsible for me but me. No one crosses your boundaries unless you allow them to cross them so I quite blaming Pete and took responsibility for my own life and happiness.

6. I quit being super woman. That was a very liberating thing. My life was so caught up in doing and in an identity of being seen as a "good" person, which meant A LOT of serving, a lot of loving, and a lot of not saying no. I really moved from being a human doing to being a human being whose soul made room not just for loving, serving, joy, etc. but was also now able to allow sadness, anger and disappointment be a part of it.

7. I quit overfunctioning in our family. One of the reasons Pete was able to overfunction in the church was because I overfunctioned at home. I was the primary parent, I took care of our home, our schedules, holidays and special occasions, vacations, shopping, etc., etc., etc. Once I stopped overfunctioning in these roles that we were called to share or I just didn't want to carry alone anymore he was forced to face his own overfunctioning role at church and underfunctioning role at home.

The goal of my Christian life is to love well. I want to love God well, I want to love myself well and I want to love others well. The sad thing is that although I had been a committed follower of Christ and a leader in God's church for over 15 years I was not a very loving person.

As a result of this journey Pete and I have learned how to truly love one another. Today I can say that I have a marriage that I never even dreamed was possible. Out of an intentional life that values one another above all else except the love of God, we have a marriage that is full of love and out of which we are able to love and lead others much better.

Finally, I believe, we are in a much better place to raise up mature mothers and fathers in Christ's church.