



Wisdom Chaser: Finding My Father at 14,000 Feet

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Answers Found on Mount Quandary

Having grown up in the shadow of a famous father, Richard J. Foster, Nathan Foster had a lot of questions about who his dad really was. Would hiking Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks enable him to get to know this distant figure at last?

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"Nate, I think if we move at a really slow pace, we won't have to stop as often. Here, watch." My father moved his feet methodically, slow but steady.

"Dad, you're crazy!" I laughed. "We'll never get there! Look how slow you're walking. I could crawl faster. You look ridiculous!"

"Do what you want," he muttered. "I'm going to walk slowly!"

I brushed off my father's wisdom and raced ahead up the mountain. After about a half hour of hiking up a steep pitch, I noticed that, with all my painful stops, he was keeping up with me. I felt exhausted. Dad didn't stop even once, and he seemed to be gliding up the mountain.

As is often the case in life, pain made me teachable. That day it was burning lungs and shaky legs. My father had a lesson to teach about hard work, and I was ready to learn. I gave Dad's theory a try and joined his ridiculously slow march. I soon discovered that if I kept going slowly, it was easier not to stop. I couldn't believe it. There on the side of the mountain, one of my lifelong quandaries was being revealed. The answer was just so simple.

Pace yourself.
Move slowly.
Don't stop.

This turned out to be an ingenious way to climb a mountain. If I know my limits and am willing to accept them, all I have to do is keep moving forward. Dream big and find my pace.

Eventually we summited with grace and precision and a slow, steady pace. The destination proved more remarkable than I had remembered from our last climb.

With blurry vision and cloudy thoughts, I gazed upon mountain after mountain poised against the horizon. I was dirty, tired and proud. My head throbbed in pain; my legs were swollen and useless. I took a bruised apple from my pack and bit in. It tasted delicious.

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I glanced over at my warrior father. He never came across to me as particularly bright or clever, but what he lacked in knowledge he made up for in hard work. Apparently my dad was never much of a student. He was the kid who studied constantly and still got Cs. Dad seemed to have some natural understanding of some topics, but of others he certainly didn't. All my life I had watched my writer-father work diligently, trying to learn high school grammar and sentence structure. For a writer before the days of spell check—it always seemed odd that he couldn't spell basic words. I knew that if I needed help spelling a word I shouldn't ask Dad, because he wouldn't know. He would take the time to practice the forgotten art of looking up a word in the dictionary with me, but it was usually quicker to just ask my mom or brother.

It's really no wonder that Dad had discovered this great way to hike up steep elevations. In one sense this is the way he lived his life. It seemed to always take Dad forever to complete a task. I once heard my father quote a famous writer who said he had spent all morning deciding whether or not to use a comma and then all afternoon deciding whether to take it out. This was more a reality than a joke. My dad has been an author for nearly thirty years, and he has only five books to show for it. Some writers put out a book every year. "Anything worth doing is worth doing well," he would say whenever the opportunity arose.

As a child, I must have driven my dad nuts. He always attempted to do things the right way, regardless of how much labor and precision a task required. I, on the other hand, usually looked for the easy way out. "The quicker the better" was my motto. I cut every corner I could find, making up a few as I went. The results didn't always turn out the way I wanted. I was ready to learn a new way to approach tasks.

Sitting on top of the mountain, it became wonderfully clear to me how the idea of pacing fit into my smoke-free journey. How do I quit smoking? One slow, methodical step at a time.

Relax.

Slow down.

Live each moment.

I had been busy holding my breath, attacking a smoke-free life with all the enthusiasm and gusto I could muster up. I was too consumed with fighting to live the process. Without pacing, hard work is wasted. I now saw that few things were beyond my reach as long as I took my time.

The whole notion of pacing myself was so simple, yet it sparked a revolution; a cosmic shift in the way in which I attempted to live my life. My string of failures was about to end. I was learning how to hike. I was learning how to live from a man I had determined had nothing to teach me.

—excerpted from chapter four, "Finding My Pace on Mount Quandary"

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