

Quarter-Life Crises Are Good For You

*"So teach us to count our days
that we may gain a wise heart." – Psalm 90:12*

I'm about to turn 23, and I'm feeling the pinch of time. It really does pick up speed.

By 23, I expected I would have my own business, a published book, a trusty old horse, the looks of Indiana Jones, a Batcave, and a sidekick. I'm sure you had similar high ambitions when you were 17 or so: maybe you were going to travel, read all the great books, or invest and become financially independent at an early age.

I'm not saying I'm having a quarter-life crisis. But I am saying I understand the people who do.

Around the time life speeds up, it can be very easy to start forgetting and neglecting all the things you said you were going to do. By the time you reach the quarter-century mark of our lives, you realize you've either over-shot our goals or under-budgeted time and effort for your achievements.

I've done a lot of cool things in 23 year of life – things I never expected I would do. But I also see all the ways I shirked from my goals, wasted my time, wasted good wealth, and stayed comfortable when I should have been bold and wise.

Here are a few things I wish I had known coming out of my teens into my twenties:

1. Always be cultivating and protecting your independence. Breaking out of the gravitational pull of the life model set by your parents and your peers is harder than you think. It's not a once and done thing – as I assumed somewhat. You must constantly review your lifestyle and resist the subconscious pull of imitating others. You must be capable of repeating all of the hard decisions and hard conversations and hard sacrifices of your "coming of age" in new forms.

2 Things come in cycles – so prepare for a marathon, not a sprint. Each moral dilemma, expense, setback, challenge, duty will feel new, like a one-time challenge that can be forgotten and then left behind. But you will realize slowly that these things come in cycles – and that you have to budget for them in terms of time, energy and resources. Too many times I've thrown everything I have at a problem or desire, only for it to come back again to find me unprepared. I should have

3. Time dilates. Again, that old thing about time running faster? It's entirely true. Once you get into work, you'll find all of that youthful free time shrinking and shrinking. It's easy to be lulled into thinking that just working a job well is progress. It isn't – not if you want your own Batcave or cruise ship (insert wildly big goal here). You will have to notice how the weeks and months blend together – and learn from that flow how precious your time is. To manage to reach your goals as your time shrinks, you will have to be increasingly disciplined and intentional about how you use your time.

4. You aren't special. Around my age, you start losing all of that “special snowflake” status you may have had when you were college-aged. You no longer get to compare yourself to college students. You finally have to compare yourself to what you thought your adult self would be like. And you probably will be disappointed. But that's a good thing. You should be competing against and aspiring to the kind of lives led by the best men and women in history. And to even start on that path, you have to realize how far off the track and how unexceptional you currently are.

5. Progress and regress both compound quickly. Most if not all progress works on the principle of compound interest. And with time going by faster and faster, you can either see progress or regress compound faster and faster. Every year passing by puts you further behind or further ahead – there is no standing still. Small habits started young will snowball (particularly where character is concerned). I've gone from running a mile to running a half-marathon in a year of progress on one metric. I've also seen myself spend more and more of my money (money I should be investing) from a habit of trading money for convenience. Not good. I've also wasted this effect by spreading myself too thin on things to learn or do.

The reason I'm *not* having a quarter-life crisis? Because now I know these things. And I know it's half-time for my youth. In the words of Clint Eastwood (just replace “America” with “me”)

“All that matters now is what's ahead. How do we come from behind? How do we come together? And, how do we win? Detroit's showing us it can be done. And, what's true about them is true about all of us. This country can't be knocked out with one punch. We get right back up again and when we do the world is going to hear the roar of our engines. Yeah, it's halftime America. And, our second half is about to begin.”

We need a good hard slap in this day and age to remind ourselves that life is short. We

need a good reminder that life is passing us by and life will pass us by – comfortably – if we don't do anything about it.

Let's use our birthdays (and quarter-life crises) to remember that.