



July 2014

Dear friends,

My husband has been reading books about the Appalachian Trail, a hiking trail that is approximately 2180 miles and runs from Springer Mountain in North Georgia to Mount Katahdin in Maine. People that hike it without stopping are called "thru-hikers" and typically spend about six months on the trail.

One of the books he just finished was about a man who ran a shop in the North Georgia mountains, literally right on the trail. He helped the hikers in many ways as they stopped through his store and his hostel. He gave them food and coffee. He helped them lighten their backpacks and figure out what they really needed. He gave them a place to stay and a warm shower. He listened to their stories and offered wisdom or maybe just a kind word.

As he describes the wide, strange variety of people he met over the years, he says that they all contribute something. They all make the Appalachian Trail what it is, give it the character it is known for. Instead of judging people for their weird ideas, the oddities they choose to carry with them, or the crazy stories they tell, he looks at each and every individual as contributing something to the overall community of the trail. He says that we all have to "hike our own hike." Each hiker has their unique reason for trying to live in the woods and hike for half a year.

Our family enjoys adventure and loves to be outside. We have wanted to thru-hike the Appalachian Trail since we first got married. Now we have two boys who want to go also. We plan to start small, maybe hike a section at a time at first. What are our reasons for wanting to do something crazy like this? Freedom from busyness, the peace of the woods, slowing down to a simple pace we've never known before, having hours on end each day to spend talking with God and each other, challenging ourselves to do something incredibly hard, working together as a family to accomplish a goal.

Statistics vary, but according to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, only one in four people who attempt to hike the Appalachian Trail actually finish it. Can we be a part of that small number of finishers? Will we ever get six months of "free time" to go and do this? Can we break free of the obligations of life long enough to enjoy it in such a unique way?

And, the question we've been asking more than these is, how do we "hike our own hike" in normal, everyday life? How can we get better at respecting the way other people hike their hike without judging them? What exactly is our hike (our purpose) when we are trying to get through a day?

A typical day for me lately has felt like this... try to wake up early so I can have a few moments of quiet, but here comes a kid, up early, ready to talk and eat. Fix him breakfast, try to find him something to do besides play video games or watch TV. Might as well start work now, need to work a few hours today to meet a deadline, pull out the laptop to read the work emails. Haven't been to the store in a while and we're out of the basics, when can I do that? "Mom, the toilet won't flush!" Laundry is overflowing, put on a load before it gets too hot to run the dryer, make the doctor appointment that's way overdue, what in the world will we have for dinner? The other kid wakes up with a bloody nose, need to clean him and his bed. Pull something out of the freezer to thaw, clean up the spills from last night's dinner and this morning's breakfast, get the kids to do some chores, do a little more work while the kids are occupied. Go through the stack of bills and pay the ones that are due, redirect the kids from fighting with each other to reading, learning something. Answer the texts and emails from yesterday that never got answered. Emails coming in from work... need something today, can you do this real quick? Email from a friend... can you send me that picture real quick? "Mom, the dog got out again!" I hear the crash of something the dog knocked over outside, kids yelling, chasing him.

This is my hike for now. And, just when I find myself wondering, how do I ever find peace in this, God gives me a moment, just a small, sweet moment, where He reminds me. One evening, as I'm doing the dishes, I look out the window and see His creation and hear my kids and husband laughing together in the next room. This life is beautiful, even if it feels chaotic. One afternoon, sitting by a creek with my sister-in-law, we watch our kids running, splashing, laughing at each other, and I remember great memories of playing with my cousins, I savor the quiet, flowing water that is always running along that bank, no matter what is going on elsewhere. Just like God, always there, always moving.

So, as I hike this hike and I try my best to follow Jesus along the path where He leads me, I can be confident that He will help me finish.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Hebrews 12:1-3

Hike your hike and don't give up,

And do not forget to do good and to share with others,
for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:16