

You Are Already Here

*A Practical Guide to Slow Living for
Busy People*



Mara Tully

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The Gap: Everything You've Been Meaning To Change

Here we are again. It's Sunday evening, the start of another week is looming. And you're on your phone. You've been on your phone, on and off, for the past two hours. *Has it been two hours already?* You can't remember why you looked up, but now that you have, you've noticed that the day is almost gone.

It hasn't been a bad day, you've certainly had worse. Nothing went wrong. And some of the things you were planning to do did get done. You ate, you watched something, maybe you did some planning– or thought about doing some planning– and you scrolled. Now it's nearly nine o'clock and a familiar feeling is creeping up on you. It might feel like a restless buzzing in your head or something heavy sitting somewhere between your chest and your stomach. It might be a defeated sigh, the stretch of a stiff neck, a hand rubbed over lethargic eyes.

It's the feeling of a day that happened to you, rather than a day you had.

And it's a feeling you've had before. Actually, you have it most Sunday evenings, and sometimes on Wednesday afternoons, and occasionally even in the car on the way to work when the week has just begun but is already pulling at you. You know it well. It's The Gap; the distance between the life you're living and the life you keep meaning to get to. A life that's slower and isn't full of things you didn't choose, where evenings feel like yours.

You've been meaning to do something about it for a while.



There was a notebook bought with good intentions, and all the apps that were downloaded and eventually deleted. There were even a few weeks— maybe last autumn, maybe the January before last— where it felt like things had clicked and the mornings were quieter and the phone stayed in another room and you went to bed at a sensible time and thought: *this is it, I'm doing it*. But, as it does, something happened. It could have been a demanding work week, or someone got sick, or a dip in your mood or energy, and just like that, the habits faded back to the usual, and The Gap was there again, exactly the same size it had been before.

The thing is, you *know* why you want a slower life. You don't need me or anyone else to explain it to you. You've read enough, saved enough pins or reels, watched enough videos, to understand, in theory, what the change would look like. Understanding has never been the problem, has it? It's that evasive something— that everyone else seems to have figured out— that exists in the space between knowing what you want and actually being able to live it.

I've spent nearly twenty years trying to work out what that something is. I've tried and failed more times than I can

count. I've reinvented myself, thought *'this time will be different'*, and ended up resigning myself to the idea that this is just who I am. Procrastinator: Never Destined To Find 'The One Thing'. And, funnily enough, it was while I was deep in those thoughts that I started to figure it out.



Here's something you might have realised already: The Gap doesn't exist because you lack information or willpower or the right system. It actually exists because the way most of us have learned to think about change makes it almost impossible to start.

There's a version of slow-living that circulates on the internet, one that fills your YouTube recommendations or appears on your Instagram feed. It's a new you, a whole new life. It's a complete aesthetic. You're shown an entirely different way of being, delicately rendered in warm natural light and linen and ceramic, morning silence, organic (ideally home-grown) produce, and ease and peace. However far that may have been from our actual lives, most of us absorbed the idea that *that's* what we're working toward. The whole thing all at once. Slow mornings with

freshly ground coffee steaming over a neat and well-maintained journal, the phone-free evenings and the uncluttered home and the cooking from scratch and the purposeful, memory-filled but unhurried weekends. All of it at once, looking just like it does in the pictures.

It might seem like I'm exaggerating, but picture it— picture your ideal day. And compare it to where you are now. No wonder starting feels impossible. You're not looking for a new path through the life you already have. You're waiting for a completely different life to appear.

I don't want you to think I'm suggesting you can't have it. But I do want to suggest an actual strategy— something smaller, that will get you on that path now and for good. The life you're trying to build is not a different life. It is *your* life, the life you're in now, lived with a little more attention in a few specific places.

The analogue life doesn't require a different house or a different job or a different set of circumstances. It doesn't require that you quit anything, own less than you currently own (though you might end up wanting to), or become

someone new. All it asks is that you show up, occasionally and on purpose, to the life you're already living.



Of course, it's not as straightforward as it sounds.

I'm no stranger to all-or-nothing thinking. In the past, as far as I've been concerned: if I can't do something properly, there's no point doing it at all. And since doing it properly would require a version of my life I don't currently have (more time, fewer obligations, a better relationship with my phone) I can never actually start. I'll start when things calm down. *I'll start in January. I'll start when I have everything I need, when I've planned it properly and I have all the answers, when the baby stops waking up at night, when I win the lottery....*

Then there's the waiting-for-the-right-moment problem, which is just the same as all-or-nothing in a different coat. The right moment, I've found, has a way of never quite arriving. I'm sure you're aware of that too. There is, and there always will be *something*. The right moment is an alluring illusion. The only moment you can ever guarantee to exist is this one.

And there's the third problem, which I don't think we consider enough: the problem of small changes feeling too small. When you put the phone in another room for one evening and nothing changes, you clear a surface in the kitchen and the rest of the house is still full, or you wake up early for your quiet cup of coffee but by eight o'clock your day looks exactly like every day that came before it. Small changes don't produce the feeling you expected, so they feel like failures, so you stop.

This is The Gap's best defence mechanism. It convinces you that anything short of a total overhaul doesn't count.



These things don't feel like enough because they don't change the whole picture, but the whole picture was never what you were actually looking for. You were looking for *the feeling*. And, as it happens, *the feeling* is achievable.

In a peer-reviewed study published in *Science*, Harvard psychologists Matthew Killingsworth and Daniel Gilbert found that people spend nearly half their waking hours thinking about something other than what they're currently doing. They found that this, more than the activity itself,

predicts how happy those people feel. In other words, the slow life isn't about having an overhauled set of activities. It doesn't matter so much what you're doing, but whether you're actually *there* while you're doing it.

That's useful, if not a bit uncomfortable to know. Uncomfortable because it means that The Gap isn't really about time or needing a slower life in order to be more present. It's the other way around. Presence is what makes the life feel slower. It's uncomfortable because you can no longer pin the blame on something out of your control, because presence is available even in the life you already have.

Oliver Burkeman puts the same idea another way in *Four Thousand Weeks*, a book that confirmed a lot of my thinking here. Your experience of being alive, he writes, consists of nothing other than the sum of everything to which you pay attention. Not what you achieve, or accumulate, or plan for. What you actually notice, from one moment to the next.

This took me longer to understand than I'd like to admit. If I'm honest, I think I like the dopamine rush that comes

with the potential of a fresh start, a new system, or a complete reset. But after the planning stage, while I was waiting for everything to fall into place, weeks kept passing that never felt entirely mine. The Gap stayed the same size.

What actually moved things, in the end, was something almost embarrassingly small. I started reading for half an hour just before bed. That really was it. It was one choice, made once a day, that was easy enough to just tack on to the end of my day. And it didn't change my life, that's not what I'm saying— except that it slightly changed how the evenings felt, which slightly changed how the next days began, which over time slightly changed how the weeks felt. I think the fact that I wasn't expecting a big change left space for big changes to start happening in the background. Meanwhile, I just had to focus on one thing.

That's what this book is about; small things. The type of things you could do on a Tuesday evening when you're tired, fed up and the week isn't even halfway through.



Each chapter looks at a different part of the day or the week— the morning, the home, the phone, the working day,

the evening, the weekend— and asks the same question: what is the smallest, most specific thing that would make this feel a little more like yours?

There are no overhauls or thirty-day challenges here. No requirement that you have more time or energy or willpower than you currently have. The practical suggestions at the end of each chapter are designed to pass what I think of as the Friday test: could you do this on a Friday evening, after a full working week, with everything else life involves? If not, I've made it smaller until it can.

There's also a chapter near the end that most books like this one skip. It's about what happens when you have a good week and then slide back. It *will* happen. It happens to all of us. If anything, it's an essential part of the process. The chapter is there to make the return easier and to talk you out of the story that one bad week means you've failed at this.



Before we go any further, if it wasn't clear already: this is not a book about becoming a different person.

The version of you that wants a quieter, slower, more present life is not a future self you have to grow into. You're already there. It's the same version of you who saved the pins and bought the notebook and meant to change things. You're not starting from nothing.



I'll end each chapter with two sections that you'll be able to practically apply as you read. The first is called *The Thing*; one small, specific action, always chosen with a full working week in mind. It'll just be one thing, done once, to see what it feels like. The second is called *The Thought*; an open question with no correct answer, meant to be carried around for a while rather than resolved on the spot. At the back of the book you'll find pages for both: space to write if you want to respond to the questions, and a simple four-week grid for tracking the actions. If you'd rather not write in the book, a printable version is available to download free at tuillepress.com/resources. Neither is required, the book works without them. But if you're the kind of person who finds it useful to see something written

down, or if you've got a beautiful notebook aching to be used for something, they're there.



The Thing

Think back on your day so far and try to recall a moment when you were doing something without having decided to. It may have been one of the times you picked up your phone, or ate without tasting, or scrolled past the point where you're enjoying it. Don't judge it. Just be aware of it, and make a small mental note that it happened.

That's all. One moment of awareness.

The Thought

What does the life you keep meaning to have actually *feel* like? Try not to think about what it looks like, think about how you want to feel on an ordinary Tuesday.

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