



Enough Is Enough

*On Wanting, Money, Status, and the Hunger That
Never Gets Fed*

Getting off the treadmill while you still can

BY

DAREN READS

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by Daren Reads

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For anyone who has gotten the thing they were sure would finally do it, and felt the wanting quietly move on to the next thing. This is about getting off the treadmill while you still can.

The Treadmill

Here's a question worth sitting with before anything else. Think of something you wanted badly a few years ago. The job, the house, the relationship, the amount in the account, the thing you were sure would change everything. Now notice: you probably have some version of it. And notice the other thing, the uncomfortable one. It became normal. The salary that once felt like arriving is now just your salary. The house you dreamed of is now just where you live, with a list of things wrong with it. The wanting didn't end when you got the thing. It moved.

This is the engine under almost all human dissatisfaction, and once you see it you can't unsee it. We adapt to everything. Whatever you get, however good, your mind absorbs it, resets the baseline to it, and starts scanning for the next thing, so that the joy of getting something is real but temporary, and then you're standing on the new level feeling exactly as restless as you did on the old one. We treat each desire as if it were the last one, as if this time the getting will produce a lasting fullness, and it never does, because the machinery isn't built to stop. It's built to keep you walking.

You'll object that this sounds bleak, like nothing is ever worth wanting. It isn't bleak, it's just the rules of the game you're already playing, and knowing the rules is the only way to stop losing at it. The point isn't that getting things is pointless. It's that "I'll be content when I get X" is a promise your own mind has no intention of keeping, and you've believed it your whole life, lap

after lap, each time certain that this lap is the one that ends the running. It never ends on its own. The treadmill has no finish line built in. The only way off is to decide to step off, which is the whole subject of this book. But first you have to see clearly that you're on it, walking hard, and that the scenery you were promised at the end was never coming.

The Arrival Fallacy

There's a specific cruelty to the way wanting works, and it has to do with arriving. You spend months or years climbing toward something, and the whole time, the wanting tells you a story: when you get there, you'll feel it. The relief, the pride, the fullness, the sense of finally being okay. And then you get there. And the feeling, if it comes at all, lasts about as long as a good meal, and then you look up, and the summit you fought to reach turns out to be mostly a view of the next, higher summit you hadn't noticed before.

Almost everyone has lived this and almost no one talks about it, because it feels ungrateful, even shameful, to admit that the thing you worked so hard for didn't deliver the feeling you were promised. The graduate who finally graduates and feels strangely flat. The person who hits the income number they fixated on and notices, within weeks, that they've started thinking about the next number. The couple who finally buy the dream home and feel the glow fade into the ordinary texture of a life that still contains all their same problems. The achievement was real. The arrival was real. The lasting fullness it was supposed to bring simply wasn't there, because it was never in the achievement. It was in the wanting, projected forward onto the achievement, like a mirage that always sits a little further down the road.

Here's what to do with that, because it's not a counsel of despair. Once you know the feeling won't be waiting at the top, you can stop staking your whole happiness on arrivals, which is a relief,

because arrivals are rare and the climb is most of your life. You can let the achievement be what it actually is, a fine thing, worth doing, that will not save you, instead of an emotional payday that always bounces. And you can start looking for fullness in the places it actually lives, which are almost never the summits and almost always the ordinary middle, the part you were rushing through to get to a top that turns out to be just another slope. Stop waiting to arrive. There is no arriving. There's only the climbing, and you may as well learn to find your life in that.

The Number

Ask people how much money would be enough, and watch what happens. Almost everyone has a number, and almost everyone's number is the same: a bit more than they have now. The person making forty thousand thinks eighty would do it. The person making eighty has quietly revised the figure to a hundred and fifty. The person with two million is stressed about people who have ten. The number is never an amount. It's a direction, and the direction is always up, and it moves with you, so that no matter how far you walk toward it, it keeps the same distance ahead, like the horizon.

This is the thing nobody warns you about money, because it would be bad for business if they did: there is no amount that produces the feeling of enough, because enough was never going to come from the amount. People assume the very rich must feel financially safe, must have reached the place past worry, and then you actually look and find that the anxiety doesn't vanish with wealth, it just changes costume, attaches to new comparisons, new fears, new numbers further up. The hunger scales with the supply. Feed it more and it grows a bigger stomach. The number is a mirage that recedes exactly as fast as you approach it, and chasing it is the most normal, most encouraged, most respectable way to spend a life never feeling like you have enough.

I'm not telling you money doesn't matter, because that's its own comfortable lie, usually told by people who have plenty. Below a

certain point money buys real things, safety, options, the end of a specific grinding fear, and that matters enormously, and getting there is worth wanting. But notice the difference between climbing out of genuine danger and chasing a number that will always be a bit more than you have. The first has an end. The second doesn't, and most of the wanting that runs people ragged is the second kind, dressed up as the first. The question isn't how do I finally hit the number. The number is fake. The question is where, on the way up, do I decide that I have enough, because that decision is the only thing that ever ends the chase, and the amount will never make it for you.

The Ladder

Here's an experiment that reveals something ugly and true about us. Imagine two worlds. In the first, you earn a hundred thousand a year and everyone around you earns two hundred thousand. In the second, you earn eighty thousand and everyone around you earns forty. Most people, honestly questioned, would choose the second world, where they have less money but more than the people around them. Read that again. People will give up real money to be ahead. Which means a lot of what we call wanting more isn't about the thing at all. It's about the ranking. We don't want the house. We want the better house than our brother. We don't want the money. We want to be winning.

This is the part of wanting we least like to look at, because it's the least flattering. So much of the hunger that drives us is positional, about where we sit relative to others, which is a particularly hopeless thing to build a life on, because there is always, always someone ahead. Climb a rung and you don't arrive, you just get a clearer view of the rungs above you and the people standing on them. The ladder has no top. Even at the very summit of any field there's the gnawing comparison to the few peers who are somehow higher, and the terror of the ones climbing up behind. Build your sense of enough on being ahead of others and you have handed the keys to your contentment to strangers, to be revoked the moment one of them passes you, which one of them always will.

The way out isn't to pretend you don't feel it, because you do, everyone does, the comparison reflex is wired deep. The way out is to notice when you're climbing a ladder versus living a life, to catch yourself wanting something only because someone else has it, and to ask the deflating, liberating question: would I still want this if no one could see that I had it? A startling amount of our wanting doesn't survive that question. The bigger car, the prestigious title, the visible markers of having won, a lot of it is for the eyes of others, and a life arranged for the eyes of others is a life you don't actually live in, you only display. Step off the ladder where you can. It was never going anywhere, and the people you were trying to beat were mostly not even watching.

The Highlight Reel

There has never been a worse time to be content, and it's not because life got worse. It's because we built a machine that shows you, all day, every day, the best moments of everyone you've ever met, edited and filtered and arranged to look effortless, and then invited you to compare it to the unedited, unfiltered, fully-lived reality of your own ordinary day. You scroll, and you see the holiday, the promotion, the perfect couple, the renovated kitchen, the body, the win, and your own life, which contains dishes and worry and a normal Tuesday, cannot possibly compete, because you're matching your behind-the-scenes against everyone else's highlight reel.

This is the cruelest accelerant the wanting machine has ever been given. The comparison reflex used to be limited to the few dozen people in your actual life, and even that was enough to make people miserable. Now it runs against thousands, against the most curated moments of the most fortunate people on earth, served to you continuously, designed to be compared against, because the comparison is what keeps you scrolling and the scrolling is the product. You are being shown, by design, a stream of evidence that everyone else has more, does more, is more, and the natural and intended effect is that whatever you have stops feeling like enough, because it was just measured against an illusion built from a thousand people's best seconds.

Here's the thing to hold onto. What you are comparing yourself to is not real. It is not that other people are lying, exactly, though

some are. It's that everyone posts the peak and hides the valley, so the aggregate picture you absorb, the sense that everyone else is winning, is a composite that corresponds to no actual human life, including the lives of the people posting it. The person whose feed makes you feel behind goes home to their own ordinary Tuesday, their own worries, their own sense of not-enough produced by their own scrolling. So when you feel the familiar sink of comparison, name it: I am comparing my whole messy reality to an edited trailer of someone else's. Then look up from the screen at your actual life, which is real, and has texture, and is yours, and is almost certainly more than the highlight reel will ever let you feel.

The Hunger Underneath

Now we go under the machinery to the thing driving it, because all of this, the treadmill, the number, the ladder, the scrolling, sits on top of something quieter and more human, and if you don't see it, none of the rest can be fixed. The hunger for more is almost never really about the thing you think you want. It's about a hole, and the thing is just what you're throwing into the hole, hoping this time it fills.

Watch your own wanting closely and you'll usually find a feeling underneath it that has nothing to do with the object. The hunger for money is often a hunger for safety, for the end of a fear that started long before you had any money. The hunger for status is often a hunger to be respected, or loved, or finally seen as worthy by someone whose approval you've been chasing since childhood, maybe someone who isn't even alive anymore. The hunger for more, more, more is very often a person trying to fill an emptiness, a sense of not being enough in themselves, with stuff, with achievement, with proof, and the reason it never works, the reason no amount is ever enough, is that you cannot fill a hole shaped like worthiness with things shaped like money. The wanting is real. It's just aimed at the wrong target, and so it keeps missing, and so you keep needing more ammunition for a gun pointed in the wrong direction.

This is the most important reframe in the whole book, so don't rush past it. If your wanting is actually a hole, then the project was never to get more, it was to look at the hole, to ask what's

really missing, to find out what feeling you've been trying to buy. And the answer is almost always something money can't purchase: to feel safe, to feel worthy, to feel loved, to feel like you matter. You'll know you've found it when you notice that the people who seem to have the most peace around money and status are not the ones with the most of it, they're the ones who, by luck or by work, mostly filled the hole directly, who feel okay in themselves, and so don't need the endless more, because the more was always a substitute for a thing they already have. Stop feeding the hunger and start asking what it's hungry for. It's rarely the thing you keep buying.

Who Profits from Your Discontent

Here's a question that will change how you see almost every screen you look at: who makes money from you feeling like you don't have enough? Because the answer is, an enormous number of people, and they are very good at their jobs, and they have shaped the world you live in to keep that feeling running.

An entire economy, maybe the central engine of the modern economy, runs on manufactured dissatisfaction. You cannot sell contentment. You can only sell the cure for a discontent, which means the most profitable thing in the world is to make people feel that what they have, and who they are, is not enough, and then offer the product that promises to close the gap. So you are surrounded, all day, by the most sophisticated persuasion machinery ever built, billions of dollars and the best minds of a generation aimed at a single target: making sure you never feel like you have enough. The ad doesn't sell you a watch. It sells you the feeling that you're not quite successful enough without it, and then the watch. The feed doesn't just show you things. It cultivates the lack, because a satisfied person is a terrible customer, and a restless, comparing, never-quite-enough person is the best customer there is.

I'm not saying this to make you paranoid, and not everyone selling you something is a villain. I'm saying it because the discontent that feels so personal, so much like a true report on your own inadequate life, is in large part a product, deliberately cultivated, sold back to you, and the simple act of knowing that

loosens its grip. When you feel the familiar itch that you need the thing, the upgrade, the next level, it's worth pausing to ask: is this my own desire, or is this a feeling that was installed in me by someone who profits from my having it? A lot of modern wanting does not survive that question, because a lot of modern wanting was never yours. It was manufactured, aimed at you, and sold to you as your own restlessness. You don't have to keep buying the cure for a lack that someone else created in order to make the sale.

The Fear of Stopping

If enough is a decision anyone could make, the obvious question is why almost no one makes it. Why do people who clearly have plenty keep grinding, keep chasing, keep adding to piles they'll never use? Part of it is the machinery we've already named. But underneath that, in a lot of people, is something quieter and harder: a fear of stopping. Because stopping means standing still, and standing still means the noise goes quiet, and in the quiet you might have to feel something, or face something, that the chasing has been helping you avoid.

The endless pursuit of more is, for a great many people, a way of running. As long as you're climbing, you don't have to ask whether the mountain was worth climbing. As long as you're busy acquiring the next thing, you don't have to sit with the question of whether this, all of it, is what you actually wanted, or whether you've spent your one life chasing things you were told to want by people who profit from the chase. Stopping is terrifying because it forces a reckoning. It feels like falling behind, yes, but deeper than that, it feels like death, like admitting that this is it, this is your life, and you'd better hope you've been spending it well. The busyness, the wanting, the next goal, keeps that reckoning permanently at arm's length, which is exactly why people who could stop, who have more than enough, so often can't bring themselves to.

So if you find that you cannot stop, that enough never feels available no matter how much you have, it's worth looking past

the money and the goals to the quiet underneath, and asking what you might be running from. Sometimes the honest answer is grief, or a fear of your own mortality, or a sense of emptiness you've never wanted to face, or the suspicion that if you stopped achieving, you wouldn't know who you are. None of that gets solved by more, which is why more never works as the solution. The brave thing, the genuinely brave thing, is to stop long enough to find out what's there when the chasing goes quiet, because whatever it is, it's been running your life from the shadows, and you cannot make peace with a thing you refuse to turn around and look at. The fear of stopping is worth examining. On the other side of it is the only place enough has ever lived.

Greed

Let's name the thing we're most ashamed to admit: sometimes the wanting curdles. There's a healthy desire for more, the ambition that builds things and improves lives and reaches for something good, and then there's the thing it can turn into, where the wanting stops serving your life and your life starts serving the wanting. We have a word for that, and it's one almost no one will apply to themselves. Greed.

Here's why greed is so hard to see in the mirror: it never feels like greed from the inside. From the inside it feels like ambition, like prudence, like just being smart, like providing for your family, like winning a game everyone's playing. The greedy person almost never thinks "I am greedy." They think "I'm just not there yet," that they're being responsible, that one more deal, one more level, one more acquisition, and then they'll ease off, except the easing-off point recedes exactly like the number always does. Greed is just wanting that has slipped its leash and started running the person instead of the person running it, and the tell is not how much you have, it's what you're willing to trade for more. When you start spending the things that actually matter, your time, your health, your relationships, your integrity, to acquire more of the thing you already have plenty of, the wanting has stopped serving you. You've become the tool of your own appetite.

The point of naming this isn't to flagellate yourself, because shame just sends you back to the comfort of acquiring. The point is to develop an honest eye for the line, the place where enough

wanting becomes too much, where the drive that built your life starts eating it. Ask what your wanting is costing, not in money but in the things money was supposed to protect. Ask whether you're still the one steering, or whether the appetite is. There's no shame in ambition, in wanting to build and earn and rise, that's part of being alive. The shame, if there is any, is in not noticing when the servant became the master, when you crossed from a person who wants things into a thing that is wanted-through, sacrificing your actual life on the altar of a more that was never going to be enough anyway. Watch the line. Stay the one holding the leash.

What Actually Satisfies

So far this has mostly been diagnosis. Here's the turn, the thing that makes it bearable, because there is good news buried in all of this. Not everything is a treadmill. There is a whole category of human goods that do not work like money and status and stuff, that do not lose their flavor through repetition, that you do not adapt away and have to keep increasing. The tragedy is that the wanting machine keeps your eyes fixed on the treadmill goods, the ones that never satisfy, and away from these, the ones that actually do.

Notice what doesn't get old. The deep conversation with someone you love does not lose its value the way a new gadget does. Time spent absorbed in something you're good at, in the flow of real work or real play, does not require you to constantly increase the dose. The feeling of having helped someone, of having mattered to a person who needed you, does not fade into a restless need for more helping. Presence, the simple full attention to the life actually in front of you, a meal, a walk, a face, does not run on a treadmill, because it isn't about acquiring anything, it's about being here for what you already have. These are the goods that satisfy, and they share a quality the treadmill goods lack: they are about depth rather than quantity, about being rather than getting, about the present moment rather than the next acquisition. You cannot scroll past them or buy them in bulk. You can only show up for them.

Here's the cruel joke the wanting machine plays, and seeing it is most of the cure. The things that actually produce lasting fullness are mostly free, or close to it, and mostly available right now, and mostly not for sale, which is exactly why no one is spending billions to advertise them to you. There's no industry built on convincing you to call your friend, take the walk, do the work you love, be fully present at dinner, because no one gets rich when you do those things. So they go unadvertised, unhyped, easy to overlook, while your attention gets pulled toward the glittering treadmill goods that someone profits from. Redirect it. The fullness you've been chasing through acquisition was always available through attention, through depth, through the handful of things that don't get old. Stop shopping for enough. Start showing up for the things that were enough all along.

Generosity

Here's a paradox that breaks the whole machine, and it's so counterintuitive that most people never try it, which is a shame, because it works. The fastest way to feel like you have enough is to give some of it away. Not because giving is noble, though it is, but because of what it does to the giver, which is something the wanting machine cannot survive.

Think about what wanting feels like in the body. It's a contraction, a grasping, a reaching toward, a sense of lack pulling you forward. Now think about what genuine giving feels like. It's the opposite, an opening, a sense of overflow, of having enough to spare. And that's the trick: you cannot give from a place of lack, so the very act of giving, freely, tells your own nervous system a story it rarely gets to hear, the story that you have more than you need, enough to share, enough to let some go. The person who gives, who is generous with money or time or attention, gets something the acquirer never gets, the felt experience of abundance, of being someone with surplus rather than someone with a deficit. Misers, however much they have, feel poor, because hoarding is an act of fear and fear feels like lack. Generous people, often with far less, feel rich, because giving is an act of abundance and abundance feels like enough.

I want to be careful here, because this gets twisted into a guilt trip, and that's not it. This isn't about giving until you're depleted, or performing generosity for credit, or letting people take advantage of you, all of which are their own traps. It's about

discovering, through actually trying it, that generosity is not a cost to your sense of enough but a source of it, that the open hand feels better than the closed fist, that you come away from real giving with more of the thing you were chasing, not less. Start small if you have to. Give something, money, time, help, attention, freely, with no expectation of return, and pay attention to what it does to you, not to them. You'll likely notice the strangest thing: that in the moment of giving, the wanting goes quiet, and you feel, briefly and unmistakably, like a person who has enough. That feeling is the whole prize. Generosity is how you buy it, and the price is the opposite of what the machine told you it would be.

Wanting Well

Before the last piece, I have to clear up something, because this whole book could be misread as an argument against desire itself, and that would be a disaster. The answer to insatiable wanting is not to want nothing. That's just another fantasy, sold by a different set of people, and it's as much a trap as endless acquisition, because a person who has killed their desire isn't enlightened, they're asleep. Wanting is not the enemy. Wanting is part of being alive, the engine of growth and creation and reaching, and a life with no desire is not a peaceful life, it's a dead one. The goal was never to stop wanting. The goal is to want well.

Wanting well means staying the one in charge of your desires instead of being dragged by them. It means knowing the difference between the wants that come from you, your real curiosity, your genuine ambition, the things you'd reach for even if no one were watching and no one were selling, and the wants that were installed in you, by the ad, the feed, the comparison, the manufactured lack. It means aiming your desire at the goods that actually satisfy, depth and mastery and connection and contribution, more than at the treadmill goods that never will. And it means holding even your real wants with an open hand, pursuing them fully while knowing they won't complete you, so that the wanting drives your life without owning it. That's the whole art: to want things, to chase them, to build and reach and grow, and to do it all from a place of fundamental enough rather than fundamental lack.

The difference between the two is everything, and it's mostly invisible from the outside. Two people can pursue the exact same goal, the business, the book, the fitness, the wealth, and one is driven by lack, chasing the thing to finally feel okay, and will not feel okay when they get it, and the other is moved by genuine desire from a place that's already okay, and will enjoy the chase and the having both. Same action, opposite lives. So the question to keep asking, under every want, is not just what do I want, but where is this coming from, and would I still want it if I already felt like enough? Want from fullness, not from lack. Chase the things that satisfy more than the things that don't. Stay the one holding the leash. That's wanting well, and it's the only way to keep desire as a friend instead of a master.

Enough Is a Decision, Not an Amount

So here's the whole thing, gathered into one truth that the entire machine is built to keep you from ever discovering. Enough is not an amount. It is a decision. There is no sum of money, no level of status, no quantity of achievement or stuff or applause that will arrive and produce the feeling of enough, because the feeling was never going to come from the amount. It comes from a line you draw, on purpose, and step behind, and call enough. And almost no one draws it, because every force in the culture is arranged to keep you believing it's just a little further up, at the next number, the next rung, the next acquisition, the place you never reach because it moves as you move.

You can draw the line at any point, and people draw it at wildly different amounts, which is the proof that it was never about the amount. There are people with very little who decided, somewhere, that they have enough, and live in a kind of wealth the anxious rich never touch. And there are people with almost everything who never drew the line, who are still climbing, still comparing, still hungry, still poor in the only sense that finally matters, the sense of having enough. The difference between them is not the size of the pile. It's whether they ever made the decision, the quiet, radical, almost forbidden decision to stop, to look at what they have, and to say, this, this is enough, I can stop running now. That sentence is the only finish line the treadmill has, and you have to build it yourself, because the machine will never build it for you.

So that's the invitation, and it's the most countercultural thing I know how to say. Decide that you have enough, or find the real and reachable point where you will, and then actually stop, and step behind the line, and let the relentless wanting fall quiet, and look around at the life you already have, which you have been rushing past for years on your way to a more that was never coming. You don't need the next thing to begin being content. You need to choose contentment now, with this, and let the wanting serve that life instead of consuming it. Enough is a decision. You can make it today, at this amount, in this life. The whole machine is betting that you won't. Prove it wrong, and you walk off the treadmill a free person, which is the one thing all that wanting was never going to buy you.

For anyone still climbing, still sure the next thing will do it. It won't, and that's the best news there is, because it means you can stop waiting for the top and start living now. You probably already have enough. The bravest thing is to say so.

