

Why Do I Keep Starting Over?

Companion Workbook

The Rotten Fencepost™ Principle

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Rotten Fencepost Publishing

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This workbook is a free companion to the video "Why Do I Keep Starting Over?" and the wider Rotten Fencepost Principle teaching. You're welcome to use it for your own reflection and study, and to share it with anyone who might need it.

Introduction

Aloha. If you've picked up this workbook, there's a good chance you already know the feeling I want to talk about.

Have you ever found yourself saying these words: "This time will be different"? Maybe it was about your health. Maybe your finances. Maybe a relationship, or your walk with the Lord. You made a decision. You had every intention to follow through — and for a little while, you did. Then one day you woke up and realized you were right back where you started.

If that's ever happened to you, I'd like to suggest something. Maybe the problem isn't that you don't care. Maybe it isn't that you're lazy. Maybe it isn't even that you lack discipline. Maybe, just maybe, you're fixing the wrong thing.

I've watched this in my own life, and I've heard it from people I care about, more times than I can count. It doesn't mean something is wrong with you. It usually means we've all been handed the same bad habit: we keep repairing what we can see, and we never stop to ask what it's attached to.

This workbook won't tell you what your "wrong thing" is. Only you can find that — it's specific to your life, your history, your household. What I can give you is the same method I teach in the video: honest questions, and small, doable exercises, in the order I'd walk through them with you if we were sitting across the table.

The Rotten Fencepost Picture

For many years, I've been blessed to live and work as a paniolo here in Hawai'i. One lesson the land teaches me over and over is this: a fence doesn't usually fail all at once. You might first notice a loose wire. Then a leaning section. Maybe an animal gets through. Most people look at the wire, because that's what they can see.

But an experienced paniolo learns to ask a different question: what is this fence attached to? Because if the post underneath has begun rotting, it doesn't matter how tight you pull that wire. Sooner or later, the fence is coming down.

That simple lesson became one of the greatest teachers in my life, because people are not much different at all. We spend so much of our lives repairing the wire — we buy another planner, start another diet, make another budget, promise ourselves that tomorrow will be different. There's nothing wrong with any of those things. The problem comes when we expect them to fix something they were never designed to fix. If the fence post is rotten, new wire is not the answer.

I've seen this up close in ministry. Someone tells me, "I've asked God to forgive me a hundred times." Another says, "I keep making the same mistake." Someone else says quietly, "I don't understand why I can't seem to change." I hear that a lot — including from myself — because those are honest questions. But I've come to believe they're often the wrong question, the same way I once asked the wrong question myself.

Jesus often thought this way too. People wanted Him to deal with what was visible; He looked deeper. People saw actions; He talked about the heart. Again and again, He reminded people that what comes out of a life begins with what's happening within. That isn't just good theology to me — it's good stewardship. It's the same principle: find the cause, not just the symptom.

One more thing I want you to hold onto before you go further in this workbook: symptoms are usually loud. Causes are usually quiet. Symptoms demand attention today. Causes patiently wait on the ground. That's true in relationships, in finances, in health, and in our spiritual lives. If all we ever do is respond to what we can see, we may spend our entire lives repairing the same fence.

Symptom vs. Cause

Before you go looking for the fence post underneath your own pattern, it helps to separate three things I mentioned above: what you can see, what you keep fixing, and what may actually be underneath.

Take a minute with each of these. Don't rush to the third one — sit with the first two first.

1. What can I see? (This is the wire — the visible symptom. The missed workout, the overdrawn account, the argument, the skipped devotion.)

2. What do I keep fixing? (This is the "new wire" — the planner, the diet, the budget, the promise. Name the specific thing you keep replacing or restarting.)

3. What might be underneath? (Don't answer this fully yet — just write your first honest guess. You'll come back to this later in this workbook, at "Find the Post.")

The Pattern I Keep Repeating

Think of one thing you've had to "start over" on more than once — not everything, just one. Give yourself real room here; this is worth doing slowly.

The thing I keep starting over on:

How many times I can remember starting over on this, as best I can recall:

What it usually looks like right when I start again — what I tell myself, what changes, what I hope will be different this time:

How long it usually lasts before I'm back where I started:

What Happens Before I Start Over?

In the video I said this: the next time you catch yourself starting over, don't begin with guilt, don't begin with shame — begin with curiosity. Ask yourself what happened before I quit. What happened before I became discouraged. What happened before I made that decision.

This section is just for that. Don't judge what you write here — just notice it.

What usually happens right before I become discouraged?

What usually happens right before I actually stop?

What usually happens right before I quietly decide to quit, or go back to the old way?

Is there a moment, a conversation, a feeling, or a circumstance that shows up almost every time, right before the cycle repeats? Write it down even if it seems small.

What Is Feeding This?

Better yet, I said in the video — what is feeding this? That question goes further than "what happened right before." It asks what keeps the whole pattern alive underneath, not just what triggers it on any one day.

Write the pattern in one sentence first, so it's in front of you:

Now ask what is feeding this. Not the surface trigger — what keeps bringing you back to this same place, again and again? Write down everything that comes to mind, even things that feel unrelated at first. Nothing here needs to be tidy.

Look at what you just wrote. Is there one thing underneath all of it — one fence post that, if it were addressed, would matter more than any new planner, diet, or budget ever could?

Curiosity Instead of Guilt

Instead of asking "why can't I stay consistent?", what if you asked "what keeps bringing me back here?" That's a very different question. And sometimes, just sometimes, it's the beginning of freedom.

The first question tends to end in guilt. The second one tends to end in an answer.

When you've asked yourself why before, which question were you really asking? Be honest — was it closer to "why can't I stay consistent" or something else self-blaming?

Now try writing the different question in your own words, and let yourself answer it without guilt or shame — just curiosity. What keeps bringing you back here?

Find the Post

This page brings together everything you've written so far. You may not be completely sure yet — that's all right. A likely answer, held with curiosity, is enough to move forward with.

The thing I keep starting over on:

The "new wire" I keep reaching for instead (planner, diet, budget, promise, apology, etc.):

What keeps bringing me back here (not why can't I stay consistent, but what's feeding this):

The fence post I believe is most likely rotting underneath this — my best honest guess right now, not a final verdict:

How I'll know if I'm wrong, and I'll need to look again:

One First Action

Once you find the fence post, you finally have something you can repair. This isn't about fixing everything at once — it's about choosing one action that addresses the cause you named on the last

page, not another new wire.

One concrete action I can take this week that addresses the cause, not just the symptom:

How this action is different from the things I've tried before:

Reflection Space

Use this page to write freely. There's no formula here — just space. If it helps, come back to this question: what happened before I quit, before I became discouraged, before I made that decision — and what is feeding this?

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Action Plan

This Week — one small step that addresses the cause I found, not the symptom:

This Month — what I want to be true a month from now, if this one first action holds:

Ongoing — the question I want to keep asking myself, instead of "why can't I stay consistent":

Closing — Find the Cause, Fix the Cause, Change the Future

The subjects change, but the principles do not. Whether we're talking about families, health, money, leadership, or faith, the principle remains the same: if you find the cause, if you fix the cause, you can change the future.

Mahalo for spending this time with the teaching, and with yourself. If this workbook helped, I'd invite you to share it with someone who might be tired of starting over.

For the video this workbook was built alongside, and the rest of the Rotten Fencepost™ Principle teaching series, visit <https://keaupuniakeakua.faith/rotten-fencepost>.