

Letting Go (Part Two)

“The secret of being content in any and every situation”

Reflection 9 in the series “The Last Great New Command”

At the heart of being content in any and every situation is letting go. Letting go means just what it says. It means we quit clinging to one certain idea, or thing, or person, or outcome, or perspective, as if our happiness and welfare depended entirely on it. Letting go means we quit forcing things. It's not, however, the same as giving up. It means simply that we acknowledge in peace that what is happening is happening. What happens next, we will choose to do, but it will be based on a realistic understanding of what is really happening, not what we wish were happening, not even what we fear is happening. It's not the same as being lazy and doing nothing. We will act, but we will act in God's time. We will wait for power from on high. It's not even, truth be told, about spending a lot of energy thinking this through; it's about immersing yourself in the task at hand, whatever it is, washing dishes, doing homework, painting walls, learning to live a life of love.

In truth, it's about life in the spirit. It's a whole new world with a rich fantastic point of view. Our lives are transformed. We are empowered in all that we do by God-consciousness. We are never alone. Nothing can happen to us that God has not given us the resources, the spiritual gifts, the spiritual friends, to see us through. We will be alright. Whatever happens we will be alright. And now finally we are free to get on with loving those whom God has put in front of us: family, our brothers and sisters at church, our work associates and our neighbors. Having learned finally the secret of contentment, we are free to learn a life of love.

Here's one point I wish for every one to grasp. Worrying about stuff isn't good; it's not just part of life. Anxiety's not just the way you are; it's not just the way you're wired. Don't settle for it. It's trouble. It's a danger sign. It weakens you. And don't accept it. If you're always anxious and worked up, if you're always worried about this and worried about that, if your life is filled with that kind of emotional frenzy, that's kind of a problem. It's not the way life is supposed to be.

In fact, it can be really big trouble. Anxiety will likely block you from learning a life of love. It can keep us from a loving life open to all the possibilities, a life animated by trust, a life in which we have space in our hearts to love. If you're worried sick about your health, or someone's health, or whether you'll keep your job, or if you'll have to take a cut in salary or income, or how you'll finance college for the kids, or if you might have to downsize your house, or if you're worried sick that you may be losing someone you feel you can't be happy without, or if you're worried sick about the state of the world, or the state of the church, or the state of the nation, you cannot love others. It's not that I haven't tried this. I've tried really hard to still love others while worrying myself sick about this or that. But here's a report from the dark side: It doesn't work. If you do this, you can't love others. You usually can't even really see them.

Let's go back to Paul. In our Philippians' text he concludes: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength" (4:13). Now that's not self-sufficiency he's found. It's Christ-sufficiency. Paul has learned that in all things God works for the good of those who love God (Romans 8:28), that nothing can separate us from the love Christ, nothing – good day, bad day, it's all O.K.

And with this confidence – this Christ-confidence, not self-confidence – Paul knows that although things are always coming together and falling apart, and coming together again and falling apart, it is often their falling apart that brings healing and creates space for what is new and better. Paul has learned to live in the present moment. He's learned to show up for whatever life offers, to not hold back because things are not going as he wishes, but instead to acquire that kind of invincibility that comes from trusting God and therefore not being attached to any particular outcome. He's learned not to swing at every pitch because not all problems require a solution. And when he finds in himself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, he remembers that he was made for another world. Paul knows that everything that really matters in life is God's gift to us, that God loves us and equips us for every challenge, that nothing can happen to us that God has not made us strong enough to face. Nothing can happen to us that God has not given us the resources to see us through. We will be alright. Whatever happens to us we will be alright. Life will work out beautifully even if things aren't going the way we want – even if we stand before Caesar in Rome and the next person he's focused on is you. Even then. And Paul knows that his model is the one who being in very nature God emptied himself, took the very nature of a servant, humbled himself, became obedient to death, even death on a cross. And even this is O.K. In fact it's in this that one finds the deep purpose in life.

This then is what we are called to – to know what Paul knows, to see life as he sees it. It's to find out how he'd learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. It's an invitation to the life you've always wanted: knowing that God works for our good in all things, even when things fall apart; acquiring that kind of invincibility that comes from trusting God and not needing things to go in just one particular way; remembering that God loves us and has equipped us for every challenge, that nothing can happen to us that God has not made us strong enough to face; and realizing deep in our souls, knowing this for sure, that life works out beautifully even if things aren't going the way we want.

If we trust this, if we know this, we will have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation. And then through the one who gives us strength we can do anything. Including the hard work of learning the arts of love.

– Dale Pauls