

## LETTING GO

Letting go can be difficult—very difficult! Movies, plays and other forms both of entertainment as well as news are rife with stories of people who must cope with loss. Sometimes, as in the death of someone we love, it is or at least feels like an experience of total loss of meaning, hope and even safety. At other times the difficulty has more to do with crushed expectations—as when a well-respected student leaves school before graduating or a deeply trusted person does harm to one of our children and we must “let go” of the friendship and protect our children.

There are other ways that we experience loss in our day-to-day lives. You know them at least as well as I do because we have lived through these sometimes life-changing events either directly or by watching others endure loss. An innocent 3-year-old child is diagnosed with an incurable disease. One of the parents of four children, all under the age of 7, dies in a car accident leaving the remaining parent to cope with a job, a home, four children and the question of how they can manage day-to-day life much less their grief and their children’s grief.

How is it possible to “Let Go” in such complex situations?” It really is not that easy to do so. In fact, retelling the story of our loss over and over again is an important part of “Letting go” of trauma, pain or any loss of control over our bodies, our minds and souls. We may talk about it openly and so frequently that our friends and family lose patience with our continual grieving. Some might even get so annoyed that they tell us to “Get over it!” As you might imagine, that can drive a grieving person into repressing their grief so that they can be more socially acceptable.

A senior hospital chaplain (Rev. Dr. Myron Madden) came up from New Orleans all the way to Bangor, Maine (in 1979) to lead an all-day seminar on pastoral care in difficult situations of loss. He told students, clergy, clergy spouses and other healthcare professionals that to let go of suffering, to really begin to heal from it, requires that we have people who will listen to us without judging us. People who can do this are not easily found. Nor do the listeners always have the stamina to listen to the tale of our loss while not offering advice to “fix” us. It’s possible to get so exasperated with a person’s story of grief that we say, “Oh, for heaven’s sake! You have been talking about this (loss) for months. It’s time to move on!”



As I write this blog I am just in the second week after Easter. Already the cries of “crucify him” have faded into the background noise and hurriedness of our daily lives. Even the tears of the people closest to Jesus, Mary his mother, Mary Magdalene his friend and disciple, Peter, the

one He chose to lead the early Church, and the “beloved disciple” had long since died at this point following Jesus death. They had to go on with living despite their overwhelming loss.

Even now in the 21st century, if we immerse ourselves in the Gospel stories of Jesus’ betrayal, torture, crucifixion and death, we may be overwhelmed at how much he suffered loss for all of us. The reality is that when we suffer we are more likely to be accepted by friends, family and colleagues if we don’t tell people that we are suffering. “Laugh, and the world laughs with you. Cry and you cry alone,” said my father.

It is almost as difficult to forget that injunction as to forget the experience I had as a pastor over 25 years ago in northern Vermont. One of our long-standing church members was clearly dying. After I had visited and prayed for a peaceful death with her, I asked a couple who had been her friends for many years to go to her hospital room even if it was only for a few minutes. They refused. When I asked why, the husband of this couple replied, “We would rather remember her as she was.” Whether she ever realized how unwilling her “good friends” were to visit her I did not ask. There is no virtue in remembering someone as they “used to be” if we don’t at least come and offer to listen and even to pray with them “as they now are.”

To many of us the words “Let go and let God” are very familiar. We’ve read books about addiction, codependency, group counseling, being “good to ourselves,” setting limits on how much we try to do, etc. These books may help, but we need the courage to suffer with others rather than stand at a distance so that we can remember them as they used to be. That kind of courage is best grounded in faith in God and in God’s love for us and for the person who is suffering.

“Letting go” of our own burdens, whatever they are and wherever they come from requires support. We don’t easily “let go” of certain substances, old hatreds, fears or unpaid debts, whether financial or social. We may not want to remember why we resist even the suggestion to “Let go and let God” be in charge.

We can decide to stay this way. It won’t be helpful, but we can continue unaware of why we don’t “Let go.” Or we can decide to be renewed by letting go of our need to be in charge and by trusting God to be in charge. One of the strongest motivations for me to continue in the process of healing from my need to control is the example of how Jesus “Let go and Let God.” You will find it in [Luke 23:34a](#). It’s where Jesus prayed for the people who caused his suffering and death.

That is the greatest example of “Letting go and letting God” guide him that I have ever encountered! May our faith in God and in God’s Son, Jesus, continue to grow so that we willing to do the same.

As ever, if you want to discuss what I’ve written, please feel free to call or email me at: [cirrider@att.net](mailto:cirrider@att.net)

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