

Knowing When to Let Go

Part 3- *When Do I Release It?*

Human beings are known as creatures of habit. Most habits are simply patterns. We usually develop these patterns as a way of living out our lives. They help us to accomplish tasks around self-care, family, and our livelihoods. They are things we do without much conscious thought. We do them customarily at the same times and very often in the same places. A routine develops and it becomes the thing we cling to. This type of behavior can summarize our entire day.

It use to be that psychologists thought these habits were based on a particular stimulus, meaning that when the alarm clock rings you automatically know that it's time to get up, brush your teeth, and wash your face. The alarm clock would be referred to as a *direct* form of stimulus. It's something that is present in your environment and it triggers you to do the same thing each day. It was also thought that habits became entrenched as a result of positive reinforcement. This is when you do something repetitively and receive a benefit or reward for doing it each time. It's what's known as a *motivated* form of stimulus.

Therapists at one time believed that both *direct* and *motivated* forms of stimulus would automatically cause any person to develop a habit. Now, they are more convinced that habit patterns and routines are spun from each individual's goals, intentions, and other dispositions. So our choice in the kind of life we want to live has a great influence on the kind of habits we will develop.

Once formed, habits are then triggered by cues that exists in our daily life. For instance every night before a person goes to bed, he or she watches their favorite television show. When the show is over he or she turns off the television and then sets the alarm clock to wake up in the morning. So the end of the show becomes a cue to set the alarm. These things are so engrained in our everyday routine that we wouldn't think to consider stimuli and cues or how they affect our behavior, but we need to. Understanding how a habit is developed is extremely important to altering or kicking it to the curb.

The heavier side of habits is of course what we refer to as *addictions*, and this is where we'll spend a little more time. Some of us look at those who have substance abuse issues and we think to ourselves, "*how could they have allowed themselves to be overcome with such a*

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thing?" But the truth is that most of us have a psychological dependency in some form or another, and we should consider ourselves blessed if it doesn't seem to cause significant harm to our lives, at least not in the way that we see others do.

God has designed life to be a continuous cycle of growth and awareness. It's a cycle that we can neither slow down or speed up. Either we get on board for the ride or it will pass us by. Yes, life will pass you by. If you will not recognize when a growth spurt is upon you and actively pursue change, you will be what I like to call "*stuck in neutral*". You'll wait continuously on a blessing you could have had years ago, all because you fail to grow. Many of us live our whole lives in this state because of stubbornness and fear; two qualities that are tremendously harmful to our spiritual walks.

Studies have shown that even if it causes us extreme discomfort, we will still practice a habit repeatedly. Logically this sounds a bit crazy, but it's true, particularly when it comes to harmful substances and toxic people; we know that we should let them go, but we indulge them any way. We develop a dependency to these harmful things and they turn into addictions. This is what happens when the conditions which caused us to learn the harmful behavior in the first place exist from day to day. Before we know it, we begin to count on things not changing. This assumption is what allows the habit's reach to extend deep into the recesses of our minds.

Romans 5:1-5 (The Message)

*1-2*By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

*3-5*There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

Romans 5 tells us that we are to be alert for whatever God will do next. We have to retain pliability and flexibility. When we don't—when we become too comfortable—we will just about lose our minds when things change. We feel as though everything's gone haywire. In actuality things are doing what they are supposed to do. They are responding to the cycle of change and growth. If this response catches us off guard and rocks our world emotionally, we know that it's time to release and let go.

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Things drop off! People leave, relationships end, and jobs terminate, either because they've exceeded our capacity to handle them effectively, they develop another agenda, or we outgrow our use for them. This is something we must accept, and even if we don't the separation will still occur. Sometimes those things are restored and sometimes they are not, but the things, conditions, or people who leave or change should never be our primary focus.

God designed life to foster our growth. Expansion and promotion are the names of the game. We must learn to release, surrender, and let go. Our tendency to hold on to harmful relationships and addictions stems from emotions, attitudes, and behaviors that are birthed from a fear that is hidden in our hearts and minds. 2 Timothy 1:7 affirms that God didn't give us a spirit of fear, so we must make it a priority to rid ourselves of it.

Jesus Christ has set us free! Galatians 5:1 (The Message) says 1 "*Christ has set us free to live a free life. So take your stand! Never again let anyone put a harness of slavery on you.*" In the powerful name of Jesus Christ, YOU must take a stand against the things that bind you! How do you do that? Romans 5:2 (The Message) says "*We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.*" You must be willing to let it all go for the richness of what you will gain through God's love. You've got to throw open the doors of your heart to Him and Him alone, and realize that nothing can replace or come close to the joy and fulfillment of your relationship with Him. When you become convinced of that...you'll know that the time to let it go is right now.

Stay with us for Part 4!