

Easing Through Life's Difficulties

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John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Many people are struggling with difficulties, or as the Bible refers to them – burdens. Some burdens are heavy others are light. Some difficulties are huge, some merely a distracting nuisance.

They may include major or minor physical challenges. We suffer from emotional and psychological issues, relationship challenges, and temporary encounters with difficulty. We can have financial and spiritual struggles, and even false challenges – ones that don't exist, but we create them.

It is my belief that God provides us with challenges so that we can grow and become stronger, wiser, and better. Although we won't eliminate challenges altogether, we can work on quelling the unrest as we move through them.

Here are five “Rs” that may help.

First is Repent – Repent is an old-fashioned word that conjures images in my mind of a disreputable looking man holding a sign that has the word scrawled in crayon on a cardboard box, or John the Baptist yelling ‘Repent, repent,’ at the top of his lungs.

Although we don't use the word in ordinary conversation anymore, it is actually quite a useful concept. It means to turn away and not do something anymore. It comes from the Greek word 'metanoia', which means to change our thinking; to make a new decision to turn around and face a different direction. It means to think about what we are doing and make another choice.

Today it would be more acceptable for John the Baptist to be yelling, "Think again, decide again; make another choice." That may have more meaning today, but it is the same thing: repent. So, the first 'R' is inviting us to examine what we believe and how those beliefs lead us to particular thoughts and actions.

Which of our habits are positive and productive and which are unproductive and destructive? Many chronic challenges are the result of a lifetime of consistent habits. Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit." It follows that mediocrity, poor hygiene, sloth, diet-related health issues, and low self-esteem, to name just a few, may be attributed to what we repeatedly do...habits.

In addition, it makes sense that peace and ease are also hidden in our daily routine; they are also results of what we repeatedly do. Plain and simple, our behaviors and attitudes are a result of choices. Do this, get that. Do this other thing, get that other thing. We have the power to choose another behavior, choose another thought pattern, and thereby change our results.

So the first 'R' is to repent; make another choice.

The second 'R' stands for Receive. Many of us are quick to give: we give to God, we give to others, we give to the community, but we are reluctant to accept the praise, recognition, and thanks from others, and the gifts from God.

What we don't always understand in our hearts or minds is that while we are surrounded with challenge, God is surrounding us with strength, wisdom, light, and love, and is providing channels of peace and calm. Much of what we perceive depends upon our focus; what Pandora or Spotify channel we have pulled up.

I like those services: you choose a song or a genre and the next song that comes up is of a similar type – either the same artist, or the same style, or the same genre.

Our mental focus is the same: whatever thoughts we hold in mind attract similar thoughts. If we are thinking Christ-filled, loving thoughts, then like thoughts and their material counterparts are attracted to us.

The more we allow these thoughts to penetrate our hearts and minds, and receive the wisdom, joy and love, the more they affect our thinking. The result is more peace and sense of ease despite the trials that we are facing. God is an abundant Source, and we must be prepared and willing to receive the blessings of Spirit by moving our focus that direction and raising our expectancy.

So being receptive to God's good will aid us in our search for peace, harmony, and ease.

The third ‘R’ I offer for your consideration when it comes to increasing our ease during our challenges is Respect. We have respect for what we find valuable. What we respect moves towards us, and us towards it. What we don’t respect moves away from us, just as we are repelled by it. If we do not respect health, we eat poorly, we don’t exercise, we engage in habits that injure us.

What is the proof of respect? Doing things that draw the desired goal towards us. If we respect our relationship with our spouse or beloved, we show care toward the individual: we treat them well, we attend to their needs, and communicate in a loving fashion. Through mutual respect our relationships grow. If we do not demonstrate respect, relationships move away from us.

Most importantly, respect for the lessons within our challenges draws the solutions and answers to us. To examine our challenge in prayer with a still, calm, nonjudgmental mind can illuminate the solutions and draw to us pathways we could not see before. Fear and hatred of what we are experiencing can leave us lost in ignorance and self-pity.

So, we have Repent, Receive, and Respect.

The fourth ‘R’ up for consideration is that of Release. We can release old habits and ways of behaving and thinking, and then replace them with new beliefs and thought habits. That is the principle behind the Burning Bowl Service and the letter to God at the beginning of the year: to release and replace.

To best serve our peace of mind and heart we can let go of our past, knowing that God does not dictate our path by our past. No matter what we have done, we are no longer that person. God's love changes us, alters our being, and transforms who we would have become. We are loved just as we are.

We are familiar with the adage: Let go and let God. I would like to make an addendum: Let go, let God, and laugh. It is our attitude, more than anything else, that establishes our course in life. This becomes obvious when we realize that pretty much all the things that we have experienced have been experienced by other people, and many have lived through those experiences with ease, a positive nature, and even were able to experience joy again.

A house burns down ... one person claims the world has ended, yet Thomas Edison watches his life time of work go up in flames as his factory burned and he responds, "It's all right. We just got rid of a lot of rubbish." He also said, "Although I am over 67 years old, I'll start all over again tomorrow." He did; and contributed much to the world. In fact, during the fire he noticed that the firefighters were having difficulty by the loss of light and power. At that moment he was inspired to begin his journey toward creating a battery-operated light source.

We block the flow of Spirit when we cling to loss, strife, and struggle. Laughter helps relieve that blockage, and is one of the greatest releases for grief, sorrow, loss, fear, or anxiety. Yet many of us don't laugh, or at least not enough, and we don't look for things that can inspire us to laugh. So that is what I say, "Let go, let God, and laugh". Release it, whatever it is, with a light heart.

To summarize, we have Repent, Receive, Respect, and Release.

The last “R” word is Reach. Reach is my catch-all word for keep searching, learning, growing, and becoming. In Matthew 7:7 we are told, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

Christ encourages us to keep on keeping on. Keep growing, asking, searching, learning, and daring to grow and become better; to become a better you. We are being guided to increase our loving capacity, hone our skills and abilities, increase our sense of humor and our ability to change our thinking, and to receive God’s good. We are guided to respect more of the good in everything, every challenge, and every person around us. Christ is prompting us to dare to release what needs to be released.

Why do we live so small, when we are created to shine effusively and be the light of the world? You are the light of the world. Knowing that God surrounds us we can reach for more than just what is within our grasp. All things are possible with God’s help.

God wants the best for us, whether we can see that or not. Hidden in our daily routine are the seeds of greatness. I pray that we will move our eyes from our difficulties and raise them to God’s level. When we can see our life from a “higher place”, we can see the truth that God’s plans for us are perfect and right for who we are, and where we are on our life path.

Let us pray....