



JUST SAY OK

By Dr. Gary Kinnaman

I was angry.

My wife Marilyn and I had irreconcilable differences.

No, ending our marriage wasn't an option, but we needed help because *every marriage has irreconcilable differences*.

So we agreed to see our friend and counselor Al Ells. He listened intently as each of us presented our case. Mostly, it was about me. Not giving up. Not giving in. Insisting that I was right.

Al leaned toward me and said, "Let's step outside for moment." I knew I was in trouble. On his front porch, Al got into my face. Firmly he said to me, "Gary, you have to let this go."

I had no answer. I knew he was right. His simple word was utterly liberating, and Marilyn and I went home in peace. Not because Al fixed my wife. Because I let go.

Ruthless trust

This is what I've come to call *the sacred art of letting go*, and I believe it's perhaps the most important thing we can learn in life. It's the essence of faith: ruthless trust in God. It's embedded in the principal symbol of the Christian faith: the cross.

As much as anything, the cross is about letting go. It was for Jesus. It should be for us. The apostle Peter wrote,

This is the kind of life you've been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step. He never did one thing wrong, not once said anything amiss. They called him every name in the book and he said nothing back. He suffered in silence, content to let God set things right (1 Peter 2:21-23, *The Message*).

I love the simple way the NIV says it: "Jesus entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

It's the old saying: Let go and let God. In other words, the sacred art of letting is not the same as giving up. Instead, it's the art of giving in, realizing that as much as you'd like to do something about a situation that's driving you crazy or hurting you deeply, you realize you are helpless. Yet it's that moment of helplessness that has the potential to set you free and change you forever.

Simply stated, you're not in control, God is. As Rick Warren famously wrote, "It's not about you." When Jesus gave his life on the cross, he let go. Before his crucifixion, he begged the Father to change the course of his life. God said no. Jesus said OK. He did what he could, the rest was up to God. He embraced the sacred art of letting go. In fact, Jesus affirmed and established this sacred art, as Peter tells us, "Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

It couldn't be clearer. It couldn't be more difficult.

These best life practices are sometimes the most difficult to embrace. Letting go can feel like you're dying. Just like Jesus. As his human life began, he let it go:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage [something to be held on to, to be grasped]; rather, he made himself nothing [he let it go] (Philippians 2:5-7).

And in Jesus' last moment in this life, he let it go:

When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost (Luke 23:46).

Just say OK!

Right now my wife and I are in Colorado with our daughter and family. She and her husband Jeff have four *very active* children. Three of them are particularly difficult at times. Like so many kids, they are righteously headstrong. They won't give up and they won't give in. Life in my daughter's home is a daily test of wills.

I was that way. My kids were that way. Countless times I said to my children, sometimes shouted, *Just say OK*.

Now I hear my daughter saying it to her kids: "Just say, OK mommy."

Man, it's so hard. I watch and listen to my grandchildren holding on, stubbornly refusing to obey. I think to myself, If only they could just let go. It would be so much easier for them—and for everyone else in that family moment.

Adults are no different. When I was senior pastor and leading a large staff, I remember demanding that one of our key leaders, a college educated adult, married with children, *Just say OK.*

And trying to help couples through their marriage complications, I've appealed to them, *Just let it go.* Their response is consistently, "But ..." They sound just like my grandkids: "Yeah, but ..."

You finish the sentence. What bazillion righteous reasons do you have for hanging on? And not one of them helps a lick. In fact, every reason you have for holding on just sustains your misery. Your relentless reasons make others around you miserable, too. Jesus said it this way, "Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?" (Matthew 6:27). Can any one of you by being anxious, by hanging on, by refusing to let go, change one thing about your present or future?

Yes, you can change your world. There are some things you can do, should do. But what if you can't? It's the well-worn serenity prayer: Change what you can. Let go of what you can't, and learn the difference.

The apostle Paul learned the sacred art of letting go:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength (Philippians 4:11-13).

Have you learned the sacred art of letting go, *the secret of being content?*

Letting go of unforgiveness

I've come to believe that the core value of the Christian life is forgiveness. Forgiveness is God-like and humanly impossible. And nothing will give you greater freedom in this life than forgiving others the way God in Christ has forgiven you.

But what does it mean to forgive? I'm not a fan of the English word. When you tell someone, "You're just going to have to forgive that person," what are you expecting them to do? Forget? Feel good about the one who abused them? Have a totally repaired relationship with them?

Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive others who trespass against us. How do we do that? The Greek term is ridiculously simple. The New Testament term translated "forgive" is *aphiemi* (pronounced a-fee-ay-mee). It was an archery term that meant simply, "*I let it go.*"

Yes, that's what it means to forgive. To let it go. To stop obsessing about the pain. To turn it over to God. To let it go.

Unforgiveness is something you hold on to, even though the tension causes you all kinds of pain. Like an arrow on a taut bowstring, *let it go*. If the pain is deep enough, you might have to practice the sacred art of letting go every hour or so.

Here's what Jesus taught:

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins (Mark 11:25).

Note these words:

- if you hold ... that is, if you don't let go
- anything
- against anyone
- forgive them (*aphiete*) ... *let it go!*

Here's how this verse is translated in the *Amplified Bible*: "Whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him and *let it drop* (leave it, *let it go*)" (italics mine).

My friend Al

I just got off the phone with my friend Al, the guy who told me, "Let it go." Al just found out a few weeks ago he has Parkinson's disease. We both believe in miracles, that God's healing power is available for those who pray. Yet Al knows that not everyone is healed.

I asked him how he was doing, and he said, "Well. But I'm dealing with a major disappointment. This has really affected my golf game." If you think that's funny, neither of us laughed. Al loves golf and time with friends on the links.

But he added this: "God has been so good and so faithful to me. I have no doubt that he is going to be faithful in this new test I'm facing. All of us have situations in life we can't fix, and when we can't, somehow we have to find God's grace."

Like St. Paul, who had a big problem, a demon sent to torment him. Paul pleaded with God three times to take it away. He didn't. But God reminded him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 8-10).

Let it go.

And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8).