

THE POWER OF LETTING GO

By Calvin Miller

It has been almost a century since the *Titanic* surrendered to the icy North Atlantic. The arctic waters strangled hundreds of souls with the icy fingers of paralysis. Some found themselves clinging to the debris of the disaster. Those who threw their ring buoys and ropes called out, "Let go--and take hold! Let go of the trash, take hold of rings and rescue ropes." Those who heard the cry had no more than four minutes to obey. The cold and killing waters of the North Atlantic allowed them only 240 seconds of life. From freezing to survival was a brief trip. Letting go to live is often a hurried choice of courage.

In a similar way, the titanic blessings of God are never available for long. Life is short. We must number our days (Ps. 90:12, KJV) in hurried minutes. We must prioritize in seconds. We must let go of our grasp on temporary trash to take hold of things eternal.

We must relinquish and rely.

We must let go and take hold.

This is the simple recipe by which God rescues us from small-time living to teach us the glories of yielded greatness.

My life is in bondage to an old cliché: "All I will hold in my cold dead hand is what I have given away." It is saying akin to those haunting words of the Savior, "Whoever clings to this life will lose it, and whoever loses this life will save it" (Luke 17:33). All in all, I'm convinced I can never take hold of anything that matters till I have let go of everything that doesn't. But I am not naive. I've been infected with consumerism. I've developed a chronic case of "I've gotta' have it." My greed all too often overcomes my self-denial. I hang on to things that are worthless, and therefore I lose my grip on things of value. I forever hear my Lord say, "How can you and I ever walk hand in hand when your hands are so full of such poor, temporary treasures?"

I served for years as a pastor, and I have seen some regrettable results of groveling for influence. I have seen church workers competing with each other by grasping after corporate power. I knew one pastor who measured his whole self-worth in terms of his competition with fellow ministers in a race to build the biggest church in town. He had almost maneuvered himself into a position to win when his elders fired him. I then watched him try, painfully, to formulate a new self-worth when his plot to be super-pastor was taken from him. Sadly, he has never recovered.

The closer I draw to Christ, the more I understand that any type of power that can be seized usually hurts others. I have rarely seen anything beautiful come from those who pursue power. But what I *have* seen is that even the worst corporate Caesar, when he finally unclenches his grasping fists, can reach freely for significance. One of my best friends became real only when the company of which he had long been CEO gave him his "gold watch" on a coffee break and then told him to clean out his desk. When his desolation ended, he found reasons to live that were far

better than those furnished to him by the corporate ladder. With Christ at the helm, my friend came to a better understanding of his own significance.

We have the Savior for our role model. Jesus did not clutch after the competitive life. He did the opposite -- He gave up His life! "No one can take my life from me," He said, "I lay down my life voluntarily" (John 10:18). Jesus released His grasp on the one thing most of us treasure most -- life itself -- and in His empty hand His Father placed the prize of world redemption. Christ could only take hold of our lives by releasing the hold He had on His own.

"Let go and take hold," the angels shout to all who adore Christ.

"Let go and take hold," they shouted to a priest named Damien, who gave up his health in order to minister to lepers on Hawaii's dreaded Molokai Island.

"Let go and take hold," they shouted to a cobbler named William Carey, who left his shop in England and devoted himself to translation work in India that led to copies of the Bible in forty Indian languages.

"Let go and take hold," they shouted to a nun called Teresa, who gave up Albania and gained Calcutta.

"Let go and take hold," they shouted to Jim Elliott, a Wheaton College graduate who gave up his life in Ecuador to seize the martyr's gate of splendor.

"Let go and take hold!" is God's call to you.

To what are you now clinging? What can you release so that God might fill your grasp with heaven's treasures?

I have a friend only slightly older than me, who had dreams of becoming a great pianist. Her dreams were heady, and she drove herself to own them. She practiced the piano day and night. She went to church sometimes, but her dreams of glory made no real place for God. Her life was crammed with her own goals.

Then polio came, a crippling paralysis that no one seemed to understand. This monstrous disease feeds on young bodies and eats at bone, nerve, and sinew till it kills. Thankfully, polio is now an all but forgotten disease, but during the 1940s and 1950s, polio made paraplegics of thousands of children.

My friend was a teenager, and the God that she long ignored suddenly became her obsession. "God," she cried, "leave my hands whole, and give me one good leg for the sustain pedal, and I will use my music only for you."

She relinquished her all consuming, selfish dreams...and God moved. Her disease destroyed her left leg. She wore a brace on it for the rest of her life. But her right leg and both her hands

became God's instruments. Her life became His symphony. Each time I heard her play, I understood anew the power of letting go. What she gave up was but little. What she took hold of was all-significant.

She confided to me how grateful she was that God had allowed her to contract polio. The contagion had birthed in her the power to let go of everything that didn't matter to take hold of everything that did.

Another friend of mind played minor league baseball in the Dodgers organization. I don't really know if he was good enough to play for the major leagues. Sometimes I teased him that he was destined to end his career "20,000 leagues beneath the majors." But he was successful where he was. Nonetheless, after he became a Christian, he abandoned his athletic career. Then he traveled around the country giving his testimony as an ex-athlete. Wherever he spoke he threw his baseball glove into the audience and said, "This is what I gave up for Jesus."

The drama of all he had given up caused me to despise my poor testimony. I was a wimp who had nothing of value to give up. My testimony produced nothing! No crowd, no admiration, no love offering! In coming to faith I had merely gone from being a secular wimp to being a Christian wimp. My becoming a Christian was not a grand moment for God, only for me.

But in time I realized the fault in such thoughts. In reality, what my baseball-player friend had relinquished and what I had relinquished were both of small consequence.

Although it seemed to me that he had given up far more, what has anyone given up that really matters in comparison to taking on Christ? We have all let go of nothing so that we might gain something.

Still, we tend to cherish things that have no value. Why don't we let go? I can't say for sure. But I suspect that the greatest weapon in Satan's arsenal is the trick of teaching us to cherish nothingness--and most people buy into his lies. Most die clinging to nothing.

It is the worst of folly.

It is the weakest way to live.

It would be better

To relinquish our appetites and find

God's hidden manna:

To let go of all things--

Our clutching after air,

To leave our grasping habits

And find the Savior there.