

Please Try This at Home

Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

Learning to “Let Freedom Ring”

Isn't this last phrase of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" just odd? Both political and personal freedom seem so difficult to attain. Shouldn't the line read "*make* freedom ring"? Wouldn't it have made more sense for Martin Luther King, Jr. to have said "*make* justice roll down like a river"? And why didn't the Beatles say "*make* it be" instead?

There's got to be something to "letting," as opposed to "making." With making, the good thing we desire is not already there. We have to create it and bring it to completion. With letting, the good thing exists already. It is just itching to get out and flourish, but for some reason or another we are standing in the way.

This "standing in the way" of good things happens so often inside of us. There is a part of us that longs for joy and freedom, and a part of us that is scared of what that would mean and so just keeps standing in the way.

Nine “Letting” Challenges that Block Our Freedom

To bring this common problem into clearer focus, I've listed some "letting" challenges below that most of us struggle with at some point in our lives. These include the challenges of letting ourselves:

1. Take a break from trying to change circumstances and people, taking time to relax and do "unproductive" things daily;
2. Admit we have needs and ask others to help us meet them;
3. Fail without being ashamed;
4. Pursue and enjoy less-than-spectacular pleasures and accomplishments;
5. Be "unknowing," not having to be the expert on everything;
6. Tolerate uncertainty, knowing we can handle the consequences of choices we must make on limited information;
7. Treasure the pleasure and pain of the present moment, resisting the urge to always live in the future;
8. Be vulnerable to others' feelings, ideas, and leadership, not always having to be strong and in charge;
9. Commit to actively pursuing a particular life choice, moving out of perpetual indecision and reliance on others.

If you are like most people, you winced at one or more of the above "letting" challenges. The question: "But who would I be if I let myself do that?" may have come to mind. If so, the

challenges that made you wince may be pointing to places that you are unknowingly resisting freedom and joy.

For example, if the challenge of letting yourself admit that you have needs and asking others to help you meet them made you wince, that may mean that someone in your life gave you the message: “Your needs are inconvenient and you shouldn’t have them.” Now, years later, you have learned how to tell yourself the same thing even though that person is no longer in charge of you. Your refusal to admit to others that you have needs is probably blocking you from the joy of letting others meet your legitimate needs and relate to you. Because other people see that you always seem so “okay” and “helpful,” they don’t know how to love you in the ways you need them to. Refusal to let yourself be needy in front of others blocks you from the joy of having your needs met in good ways.

Eight Steps for Breaking Though to Freedom

No matter what “letting” area is a challenge for you, there is a process that you might try to start experiencing more freedom and less fear:

1. Choose one of the nine challenges above and begin to notice times that you resist that particular type of “letting.”
2. When you notice your resistance, start noting what you are thinking at that time. What are you concerned might happen to you if you “let yourself go” that way?
3. Start noting what you might be missing out on—inner peace, exciting experiences, relationships, health, etc.—each time you resist that kind of “letting.”
4. Ask yourself if your pattern of concerns is realistic. Is it likely that what you fear in these situations will actually happen to you?
5. If your concerns are realistic, make a list of your fears on one hand, and the things your fears are causing you to miss, on the other. Then decide whether resisting this “letting” is worth it for you.
6. Ask yourself where you believe your deepest value comes from. Is there a value to you that would still be there even if your fears in this area came true? If so, create a statement that powerfully summarizes your deepest source of value.
7. Next time you notice that you are resisting this area of “letting” and missing out on freedom and joy, recite your statement of personal value to yourself to help you find the strength to let the “letting” happen this time.
8. All good change takes lots of time, so go slow and let yourself fail a lot in the process. After each failure, simply note that that area is still a challenge for you and try again.

Though I admit that taking the time to do this is difficult, I encourage you to give it a try. I’d love to hear what results from it, so please let me know how it goes!

Thanks for reading!

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