

Letting Go in the Kingdom of God

By Bobby Schuller

We say this every week: “I’m not what I do, I’m not what I have, I’m not what people say about me.” I want to begin today by encouraging you that I believe you are learning to become the kind of person that really is letting those things go. It’s hard not to hold onto our reputations, to hold on to all the things that we think matter to us. Sometimes it’s money or our jobs when they’ve been lost, but we still are not letting go. Or maybe it’s of our past, or of our future. You are becoming the kind of person who is letting go of the many burdens that are pulling you down and keeping you from fulfilling what God has called you to do.

So, some of you came today and you’re thinking, “Why did they play ‘Let it Go’ in church with Alex Boye?” By the way, Natalie, our very own Natalie Leonard sang that song. Natalie, it’s so great to have you in the house. Wonderful. And the reason I asked Alex and Natalie to do this for us was because today’s sermon, believe it or not, is called “Letting it Go in the Kingdom of God.” And I wanted to begin with the movie, *Frozen*, and the success of this song. How many of you have seen *Frozen*, just raise your hands? So, everybody. And if you have a four-year-old daughter, you’ve seen it a hundred times.

The story, *Frozen*, was a huge success because it was a story about a princess, a queen who has this gift that she thinks is a curse, and it's this magical power - it's a fairy tale - to control snow and etc. And because she thinks it's a curse, she locks herself away in a castle. She's always afraid, always trying to control what people see, so she finds herself more separated and isolated from people.

Finally, when the truth about who she is comes out, she runs away and then there's this amazing moment where she's walking through the mountains and she builds a castle with ice and she makes a little snowman, who is adorable. She's doing all of this stuff with her magical powers or whatever and it's Idina Menzel, who's a famous performer from *Rent* and *Wicked*. And she's singing this song and, of course, this princess, her hair comes down and she makes this new dress and she's just like this big star. Everybody loves it because she's singing "Let it Go" in the sense of "I'm letting go of all of my worries, of always trying to control how people see me," and it's like this freedom song.

I guess what I want to ask is why was that song resonating so much with so many people? Why do you think? I think it's because the opposite is true. That instead of letting it go, all of us are constantly trying to hold on to so much and many of us feel so tired. If we were to

actually let it go, our spiritual fingers would creak as we unfolded our hands and released whatever the worries are. We're so used to worrying that we feel awkward to let it go.

The big question I have for everyone is why haven't you let it go? I think the answer is for most people that don't have a faith is how can I let it go if I don't have someone to let it go to? And that is the crux of today's message. I want you to know that when you release the burdens in your life to God, he is strong enough to hold them and sustain them, all the things that you're worried about – your kids, your job, all the outcomes that you're trying to control. Let me tell you, work hard, do your best, dream big, but in the end abandon those outcomes to God. He has your best in mind and your best future is ahead as long as you don't give up. So just let go and enjoy today. You can smile and stop worrying about tomorrow, and stop worrying about yesterday. And you are. You are the kind of person who is building into you a trust, a deep trust in the goodness of God. You're slowly learning to let go of these things and, because of it, you are becoming a happier person, and that's very good news.

You see all of the Christian journey, and most of it is about simply letting go. To become a Christian, you let go of your self-righteousness, and you let go of your past. You let go so that the hands of a loving

Father can save you. You let go of your sin so that you can inherit something new. And most of the Christian journey is letting go of the things we thought were so important to us so that we can inherit the things of heaven today. You are letting go and that's great.

There is this story I never forgot that was always so sad to me. It was a story of how Indians used to catch monkeys. My dad told me this story, and basically what they do is they take a coconut and they would cut a hole just big enough so that a monkey could put his hand in and they'd put a little jewel or a piece of glass in there. Then they would tie the coconut down to a tree or something. So what would happen is the monkey would look inside the coconut and it would see this little piece of glass, or a little piece of jewel, and it could make its hand go like this and it would take its hand and stick it through that little hole. And then when it grabs the piece of jewel, the hand makes a fist making the fist too wide to pull out of the coconut. The monkey refuses to let go of this piece of jewelry to save its own soul.

I think the world is a lot like this. Many of us are like this monkey where we could escape easily but we have to let go of this thing that's holding us back, but we just can't bring ourselves to let go and pull our hand out. But you're doing it. You are not like that monkey and you are not like the world. You are the kind of person that values the things of

heaven, and you know that there is no piece of jewelry or anything else that is worth giving up God's best for your life. You're forming into your soul the kind of character that doesn't always have to be tied down to these types of things. God is freeing you. In fact, today, I'm proclaiming over you that no longer will you be chained down to these things. Today, you're going to release your worry, your burdens, and these big heavy metal weights that you've been carrying, you're going to give them to God, and they're going to become balloons. It's going to be just like taking this backpack full of weights, opening it, and balloons come out. You're going to be free today, in Jesus' name.

Daniel 4 is the story from today in our series, and the story of Daniel 4 is a great passage. It's actually about King Nebuchadnezzar, a real historic figure, a mammoth of a man, incredible power. In his day, he was by far the wealthiest and most powerful human being alive. The prophet Daniel is in his retinue as a wisdom counselor. And the weird thing about this passage in Daniel chapter 4 is that now Nebuchadnezzar speaks to the audience. So imagine that this was a play and you'd see the play of Daniel unfolding, in which Daniel's the main character. Then all of a sudden Nebuchadnezzar does what in theater they call "breaking the fourth wall." All of a sudden, he turns and faces the audience, and he tells his testimony.

So when you read Daniel 4, it's Daniel telling us about what happened in his life. And King Nebuchadnezzar said to him, "At the end of my reign, I had this dream and this dream was about a huge tree. And this tree was huge and animals would come and find shade under the tree. But then the tree was cut down, and chains were put along the stump." And he said, "And I woke up and I went to my prophet Daniel and I asked him, 'What is the meaning of this dream?'"

And Daniel said, "Oh, King, I wish this dream were about someone else. This dream is about you, that although your branches are wide, and although you protect and care for so many in your kingdom, you will be cut down and you will be put in chains. You will lose your mind and you'll become like an animal." And Daniel says, "Until you acknowledge that heaven rules, you will not regain your sanity."

Sure enough, weeks go by and the king says, "And I was standing on the walls and I was looking at all of Babylonia. And I said to myself, 'Did I not create this kingdom for my glory and my majesty?' And that day, the Lord Yahweh struck me down and I became mad. And like an animal, I ravaged in the woods." And he carries on with a story about how he completely lost his mind until finally, he turned back to the Lord and he said this poem that Hannah read today where he gives glory to God. Very reminiscent of Job's prayer, "The Lord giveth and the Lord

taketh away.” That, Lord, all I have is yours. And he says, “And when I confessed that Yahweh was King, he restored my whole kingdom.” It’s a powerful story. And it’s an ongoing theme, especially in the Jewish Bible, in the Old Testament, this theme that all power is ultimately God’s. And that power only remains in the hands of the powerful as long as they are just. And so it’s the promise that God will undo unjust power.

And it also is the promise, and it’s the lesson, that power, all earthly power is temporary. And if you hear anything, hear that. Power is control. Power is influence. And all power that you have in this world you will someday lose. All power that we have is temporary. God, though, loves to give power to the wise, to the humble and to those who trust in him and not in their own power. So, the power that God has given you is temporary and it lasts as long as you remain humble, meek, and wise and trust in God. And you *are* humble, and you *are* meek, and you *are* wise. And as you look to build your character instead of power, God will give you more power. If you look for power, you will not get power from God. As you seek character, wisdom, and humility, God will bless you with more power, the power to make a good difference in the world, and that’s a promise.

So, when we talk today about letting go and, by the way, that song will be stuck in your head for days. When we talk today about letting go,

letting go in the kingdom of God, I'm not saying quit or give up. Very often it's easy to think, "Oh letting go, that means we're supposed to quit." That's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is do your best, work hard, and dream big, but in the end, abandon the outcomes to God. The outcomes are God's. Or, as Tony Horton from P90X would say, "Do your best and forget the rest."

You know you do your best in your relationships, you do your best in your job, you do your best if you're in ministry, but in the end, stop trying to control and manipulate people, and stop trying to control and manipulate outcomes. When you abandon outcomes, you're able to trust that, if I did my best but didn't get what I wanted, God has something better in store for me, and he does. You see, so much of letting go is the posture, as we teach often, the posture of the open hand. When you let go of something in the kingdom of God, you're actually opening your hands to receive something new. In Christianity, we call this the Paschal mystery, or the Easter mystery, that in order to receive life I have to first experience some sort of death in my life.

We're so afraid of death and loss that we can't let go of the old things in order that we can inherit the new things God has for us. So for some of us, we're holding on so tight God is saying, "Unclench your fists and let go so that I can give you something new and awesome. I know it

hurts. I know it's been hard. But you can trust me. I'm going to take care of you.

Friends, you don't have to worry. You don't have to be afraid. Your best days are ahead if you simply let go of the outcomes, abandon those outcomes to God, and know that he will come through for you.

When you abandon outcomes, you learn to stop being controlling and you learn to be empowering to others. You are not a controlling person; you are an empowering person. You are the kind of person that sees the best in other people. You're the kind of person that, even when you feel afraid about what they might do when you give them freedom, you empower them to be their very best. And because of that, people look to you for leadership and encouragement. And you continue, God bless you, to be the kind of person who lets go of people so that you can empower them and strengthen them. You don't push, you don't control, and you don't manipulate. You're the kind of person who empowers people and doesn't control them, and that makes you a better leader.

Some of the worst leaders in the world are those who always try to micromanage everything. If you've worked for someone like this, you know how horrible it can be when somebody comes in and says the smallest little thing is wrong, and this is right, and those types of leaders

are holding onto everything tight. But that's not you. You're a good leader because you believe in people and you're not afraid of them messing up because you know that when other people mess up, you'll be there to encourage them to help them be better.

People that are not controlling but are empowering are also better friends, and you're a terrific friend because you don't try to control your friends. You don't freak out when they don't call you back or text you back. You're letting them go. You want them, you desire a friendship, but you're no longer your worst enemy by constantly being afraid that everybody is abandoning you or leaving you.

This is also true in parenting. When you empower your kids and your grandkids instead of trying to control them, you're able to help them become adults and grow into the persons God has called them to be. Now I've never been a parent of a teenager. I've heard it's easy. But I was a teenager once, and I know that there's this tricky time in parenting, and it probably depends on whether it's a boy or a girl. I think there's this time for teenagers around 15/16/17. Where, as a child, you do have to control your kids, you have to discipline your kids, you have to say do this, don't do that. But, there comes a point when a teenager is becoming an adult that the parent has to take this very scary move of not controlling and manipulating anymore and moving to a posture of

essentially coaching, listening, but also really empowering. You have to trust that this person who's becoming an adult can become an adult and can be responsible, and I think that's one of the hardest things that parents face.

So, if you're going through that with your teenager, my suggestion is, and I know I digress here, for every one minute you tell your teenager to do something, supplement it with ten minutes of listening, and start with those ten minutes. And this is a good rule for leadership in general. I think it was John Maxwell who said the famous cliché, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." And that is true through the posture of listening. How many teenagers can't stand their parents because their parents don't listen to them? Somebody on Twitter said to me something like, "How do I get my teenager to X, Y and Z?" I was like, "You probably just need to start listening to your teenager." Because if you get to the point where you're saying how do I get somebody to do this, you're asking how do I manipulate them into doing something they don't want to do.

Leaders want to inspire people and form them to desire good things. And you're doing that. You're a good leader, you're a good friend, you're a good parent, you're a good spouse if you're a spouse, and you're good because you've learned that controlling and manipulating is not

helping anyone. That empowering and inspiring is the way to live your life with people, you do that, and that's great.

I think so much of the worry, burdens, and sin that we carry in life are based on the deepest psychological need, which is fear of abandonment. All of humanity carries within itself this fear that I'm going to be left alone, I'm going to be outside of the circle, no one's going to care for me, and the reason this fear is so great is because bonding with a loving person is the greatest human need. That's why at Shepherd's Grove every single Sunday we begin with bonding with the person of Jesus Christ. And we remember that grace abounds, that in spite of all of what I do, what I have, what people say about me, that those things for God don't matter as much. What matters is that I simply trust in him.

So, I want to say this to everyone. God is your shepherd, and he won't let you go. So we're afraid of letting go, but God won't let you go. This is one of the most famous passages in the Bible, Psalm 23. "The Lord is my shepherd. I want nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures." You know, the green pastures is the idea that green pastures are where the sheep go to eat, and if a sheep lies down in green pastures it's because it's so full it can't fit any more pasture in its belly. So it takes

a nap on this really soft grass. So, it's like saying God has made me full, and he's giving me rest.

And it finishes with this wonderful line: "Surely goodness and everlasting love will follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." That is for you one hundred percent. God loves you, he's never abandoned you, and he will not let you go. Jesus takes on this symbol of being the good shepherd. He says a good shepherd lays his life down for his sheep, and Jesus did lay his life down for you. And you know what? He continues to lay his life down for you even today. What I mean by that is that he teaches a story about a lost sheep, one sheep that goes and there are 99 that are in the fold. And he says that shepherd will not stop until he gets that one sheep back into the safety of the fold.

No matter where you are in life - you may be in addiction, you maybe have completely lost your faith, maybe you lost all your money, maybe you lost your whole family - God has not given up on you. He's not let go of you. And you can let go of your past and you can soar and receive the shepherding of Jesus Christ. You can trust in him. He will not let you go! He won't. He's your good shepherd.

Henri Nouwen tells this wonderful story about the trapeze swingers at the circus. When he said he once met with these trapeze swingers, these guys that swing back and forth, and the two most important people are the flyer and the catcher. And the flyer is always the most famous one. He's the guy that goes through the air ten/fifteen feet, maybe he does a flip in the air, he does this amazing stuff. And he talked to the flyer and the catcher and he says, "You know, the flyer gets all the credit, but the real hero up there is the catcher." He said, "For the flyer, you simply have to extend your arms and trust and just close your eyes that this catcher's going to catch you." Henri said to him, "So, you never want to catch the catcher, right?" He said, "Oh no! If you try to catch the catcher, you could break his arm; you could mess up the timing." Simply the flyer needs to let go and extend its arms out, and receive the gift of being caught.

And that is the message of the gospel. We're trying to force these things to happen. Today it's time for you let go so that you can soar through the air. And there is a moment when you fly that is exhilarating when you don't know if someone's going to catch you. The catcher will catch you. You'll be safe. Don't try to catch them. Don't force anything. Just extend those loving arms and our Father in heaven will catch you. You're going to be okay. You don't have to worry, you don't have to be afraid, and you're not afraid. You're brave, you have courage, you're not

afraid, that's not who you are. You're brave. You know God has been there for you. You know he's caught you every time and he will catch you again. It will be okay. Let it go.

So, for those of us that are worried, it ends today. You're not worried anymore. You're at peace and you're relaxed. And you're not relaxed because you're dumb; you're relaxed because you're strong and you're smart. You know what other people don't know – the power of God in your life. You're no longer worried about your past. Your past does not define you. Your future is whatever it is you want it to be. You can let go of the sin, you can let go of the mistakes, you can let go of the regret and form a new tomorrow in Jesus' name.

So, let go of the past. You're not worried about the past anymore. And you're not worried about tomorrow. You're not worried about physical needs, you're not worried about whatever sickness is ailing you, and you're not even worried about death. You know that God is faithful even in death to save us.

Hey, you're not worried about tomorrow, you're not worried about the past, and you're not worried about your reputation. So many of us are up late at night because of something somebody said about us. We need to stop worrying about what other people think about us and only

think about what God thinks about us. And he thinks the best of you. You don't have to manage your reputation. You're loved by God. You're loved by this church and you're loved by me. You're going to be okay.

Great things are in store for you. Don't be afraid. Don't worry. Smile today and enjoy every breath and every moment God has given you because it is a gift. And I know you do, and I know you will. You'll continue to empower people. You don't need to control people. You'll continue to abandon outcomes and receive the great gift from Jesus Christ - new life every day that you trust in him, in Jesus' name.

And so I want to just pray for everyone this morning, and if you're here today and maybe you're watching on television and you say I don't have any idea what you're talking about. I don't know God, I don't know Jesus, I want to offer to you the forgiveness of sins, and new eternal life. Maybe you say I grew up in church, but I've never made a decision. You know when I made a decision to follow Jesus, I didn't stand up, I didn't go down, I just made a rational decision in my seat - I'm going to follow Jesus Christ.

And so I'm going to ask you who are watching at home and you who are here in the church, let's bow our heads and close our eyes, maybe hold your hands out like this a sign of letting go of all the stuff

that's bogging you down. Everything you're angry about, everything you're worried about, everything you're frustrated about we're going to just release that and give it to God.

I ask that the church and everyone watching on television, that everyone pray this prayer with me: In Jesus' name, I come before you, God. Forgive me of my sin. Make me a new creation. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. Equip me for my destiny. Help me to do the next right thing. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.