

Are You Stuck?

Do your circumstances seem hopeless or out of your control?

by Elvira Delaplane

The effects of dementia were taking their toll on my aging mother...and on those of us who were attempting to care for her. After a particularly difficult evening, during which we feared that she would hurt herself, we had no choice but to call paramedics to help us get her to Emory Hospital. After the paramedics gave my mother a sedative and managed to get her into the ambulance, I decided to ride with her to the hospital.

While keeping an eye on my restless mother, I struck up a conversation with the ambulance driver. I asked him how he got into this line of work. "This is my second job – I now work two jobs to replace the income that I lost when I was laid off from my original career. But my wife loves the house where we live and it takes the two jobs to keep up with the house payments." The driver mentioned that he had a precious young daughter with whom he didn't get to spend a lot of time. "Why don't you sell the house and buy something smaller?" I asked. "But my wife loves our home..." I didn't pursue the conversation any further.

Why do we feel so stuck in our circumstances? Why does simplification feel like failure? The above exchange happened well before the housing meltdown when selling a home was not nearly the challenge it is today. But, under the desire to not disappoint his wife, this fellow was sacrificing his marital intimacy and time with his daughter that he would never be able to recapture.

When I was a child we often heard the phrase "keeping up with the Joneses" to denote one's desire to acquire material possessions and an air of affluence equal to our neighbors and friends. Whether it was "the Joneses" or our personal need to prove ourselves or the desire to give our children more than we had, many of us baby-boomers most certainly got caught up in the acquisition of bigger and bigger houses and other "toys." My husband and I played the game to the best of our ability; one of our many justifications was that "real estate is a good investment." As we created the environment we thought we desired, we allowed our marriage to get less and less intimate by spending so much time taking care of "the things" in our lives. It finally required us to hit a life-changing emotional wall to shake us to our core about the utmost importance of relationships in our lives. As Gary Smalley says, "...everything else is details."

There's absolutely nothing wrong in enjoying the material blessings that God has put into our lives. However, when they get in the way of the truly important...and we feel stuck or a slave to them...perhaps God is asking us to re-evaluate our priorities. Is He truly first, followed closely by our husband and children and other loved ones? I clearly remember the day that we moved into our much smaller house in a tidy little neighborhood – after selling the big house and giving away many of the possessions that we had accumulated over twenty-three years of marriage. My husband sat in our den and uttered words that I had never heard come from his lips before, "So this is what contentment feels like!"

If you're feeling stuck by the circumstances of life, give it all to God – He will sort it out for you. It is truly liberating!