

Here's The Point!

Life Lessons from Mother Lynn

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"String Dynamic"

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(Biblical text is II Kings 5.1-15)

When my youngest daughter was about two, we visited a relative who had a child the same age. Nessa and Jeffrey had a lovely playdate, but just when we were slated to leave, Nessa decided that she wanted to take home a piece of string that they were playing with.

Yes, you heard right - *string!* A huge power struggle ensued. Naturally, I insisted that we leave the string with our host. Nessa thought otherwise and *screamed* and *flailed* the whole car ride home – making it the 45-minute ride from you know where.

Inflexibility - "*it's my way or the highway*" - is okay in two year olds, but not with us! The problem with this stubborn stance is not only that it's unpleasant and immature but also that it stops us from seeing *grace* and *goodness*.

Focusing on the deprivation - meaning the "*I didn't get my piece of string*" stopped Nessa from seeing that she'd had a lovely afternoon with a friend. (Put in your own experience of "*I didn't get*" ... "*this isn't how it should be,*" etc., and notice what it stops you from enjoying!)

Here's the point: the dynamic of focusing on loss instead of gain - the small not the whole - keeps us mired in resentment, turmoil and bitterness. It keeps us focused on OUR way, not THE way.

St. Paul calls this spiritual myopia *missing the mark*. It stops us from achieving God's intent for us, which is healing and peace. I'd like to label it "***the string dynamic.***"

That "*string dynamic*" almost stopped Naaman from being healed. Here's the story: Naaman, an important 9th century B.C. Syrian army commander (think Colin Powell or General Petraeus today), suffers from leprosy. His wife's maid tells him about a great Israeli healer named Elisha.

After several false starts and with much advance publicity, Naaman drives his chariots and horses over to Elisha's house. Stationed outside of Elisha's house, Naaman waits for the prophet to come out and heal him. Instead, Elisha sends out a messenger with instructions. Naaman explodes at the messenger.

This isn't how he pictured his healing occurring. It's the string dynamic. "*This is not the way a great leader is treated!!*" Clearly, Naaman expected an elaborate healing ceremony instead of simple instructions about dipping himself seven times in the Jordan River - which everyone knows is dirty!

Naaman rages, "*I thought Elisha would come to me and wave his hand over me and call upon the name of YHWH, his God!*" He wants theater with his healing. Then Naaman does the human thing - he begins to name several much more attractive healing alternatives. He recites several

lovely rivers in Syria, which would be more pleasant than a dip in the murky Jordan. Then Naaman turns around and goes off in a fit.

Notice the *string dynamic* – “it’s my way or the highway.” Notice too – he turned his back on and walked away from God’s representative!! Never a good idea!!

Literally, by the grace of God – again a servant intervenes and pleads: “*My Father, if the prophet had asked you to do some great thing - wouldn’t you have done it? Then why not turn when he says, wash and be clean?*”

Scripture records a deafening silence. He’s thinking. Finally, Naaman turns around - always a good idea - takes the prophet's advice and is healed. Scripture tells us: “*His flesh came back like that of a little child and he was clean.*”

So what about us? *How do we look at the grace, not at the grime?* How do we let go of our way, turn around and get in line with God’s way, which brings healing and peace?

Two answers – *first, recognize when the string dynamic is operating. Be attentive to when you’re looking at the grime and not the grace.* For the second answer - a second story – this one by Sean Murphy (The Sun -10/02):

“In the sixties, a monk lived in rural Tennessee where he attracted a group of students from a nearby university. The monk lived in a cabin, which had a huge dead oak on the lawn. One neighbor happened by and said, “*You’d better cut it down or it’s going to fall on your roof.*” The next time he went to town, the monk bought a hatchet at a thrift store. He promptly set to work on the tree’s enormous trunk – chopping away for some time every morning and showing no signs of discouragement at his minimal progress.

Neighbors showed up with a chain saw. “*No thanks,*” he replied cheerily. Months of chopping went by. People talked about the strange monk.

One day the tree finally fell. It shook all the houses on the street. Neighbors asked: “*What will you do now?*” “*Make firewood,*” he replied. The monk later told his students that this is the key to the spiritual life. “*You just chop away – a little bit every day – and one day an enormous tree falls!*”

Here’s what you need to remember: *recognize the string dynamic. Then chop away at it until you experience God’s healing and peace.*

Amen.

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