

2, Pausing for Breath – the choice is always before us

It is three pm. I'm at the check-out in Safeways. I'm irritable and feeling sorry for myself. It's been a difficult day, so far. All morning, everyone seems to be having a go at me. My feet are cold. It's snowing outside. Now it's getting too hot inside. And the man in front of me in the queue is paying for his half-pound of sausages by some complicated method that requires him to sign three documents. I'm inwardly fuming; I have so much to do before evening . . .

I then do a few very simple things. In the first place I stand up straight and take a few deep breaths. Ah! That's better. Already my shoulders are beginning to drop and my body relaxes a little. What a relief! . . . Then I begin to think differently about what was going on inside me. Why was I making myself so unhappy? Why was I blaming everyone today – God for the snow, Safeways for the ehat, the poor man in front of me for holding me up? 'This is crazy,' I said to myself. 'All this thinking is only damaging my own peace of mind.'

So I began to think of all the good things in my life. My cold, for instance, is getting better. I'm beginning to forget about my recent break-in. Lst week the doctor gave me a clean bill of health, my friends care about me . . . Then I remembered how I used to love the snow as a boy in Ireland, how I loved the warmth of our small grocery shop on a cold day, how this delay at the check-out is giving me chance to pause for a moment and say a prayer of thanks to God that I'm alive and able to walk about the Market Place this Thursday afternoon . . .

What's happening to me is a growing awareness of the choices I have about how I live and feel each day. I imagine a line running across my mind, separating my thoughts. Below the line are the murky waters of complaining, fretting and anxiety. Above the line is where the positive and hopeful energies are waiting to be tapped into.

It is at this point that I have a choice. I can remain a victim of my own negativity and descend into the self-perpetuating distress of the touchy ego. Or I can reach out of that swampy place and find the firm and life-giving ground of positive thinking and letting-go. This is now a daily habit that brings untold relief. It is like escaping from a suffocating and moody cellar into God's fresh air.

So, God is good. Enjoy today. You have a choice about how you spend it. It is up to you.

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