



# Letting go

“For where your treasure is, there  
your heart will be also” (Luke 12:34).

BY KATHRYN HAUEISEN



ONE OF MY SEMINARY PROFESSORS kept a phrase written on the classroom chalkboard: "Every loss is a gain; every gain is a loss." Life seems to consist of an endless cycle of gains and losses. Along with the losses that come in one form or another, I've also gained many possessions; too many to keep as my husband and I now contemplate moving to a retirement community. Like many Baby Boomers, we're in downsizing mode. Accepting our need to let go of many things does not make this less challenging.

Further complicating the situation is the fact that when I remarried a few years ago, my husband and I merged two full households into one. What didn't fit went to storage for grandchildren to claim as they set up their first apartments. Now that storage unit is closed. The last few items, along with boxes and boxes of family photos and documents, sit in our garage and dining room.

A garage sale cleared out most of the household items, but not the solid maple kitchen table chairs, which we donated to a local charity that was willing to pick them up. The driver said he was taking our set straight to a family that had lost all their furniture when Hurricane Harvey flooded their home. Hearing this helped me let go of the table. My fond memories of meals around that table won't be the last. Now our table will host another family, as they create their own memories.

## LOSSES AND GAINS

Our home is full of things acquired over decades. Days I once spent shopping I spent hauling loads to various consignment and thrift stores. This process of letting go made me think about the wisdom of Scripture. I don't want my possessions to possess me, so I've had to lose some things I still cherish. At first, letting go of what I've treasured feels like a loss, not a gain. Seeing the gain takes time and spiritual eyes rather than physical ones.

*I've learned  
to find joy in  
letting go, bit  
by bit.*

The waste-not-want-not philosophy my family instilled in me makes it virtually impossible to throw away perfectly good items. Letting go became easier when I saw how God turned my loss into a blessing for someone else. For example, one downsizing day I decided to find a new home for the box of fabric pieces stored under the bed. I offered the fabric scraps as quilting supplies on an online marketplace. The husband who claimed them said they would be a surprise for his wife. Although multiple sclerosis limits what she can do, she can still sew, he said, adding that these

scraps would hopefully encourage her to make the quilt she'd been talking about. My loss became a sign of his devotion to her.

Then I began to make digital copies of the photos in the many boxes I moved out of storage. I gave my daughter one of the albums. My daughter gave a couple of photos to her former college roommate since they were both in those photos. I learned that a fire had destroyed her roommate's childhood home, along with all their family photos. She had no photos of herself in her younger years. She was grateful to receive the ones I let go.

Another downsizing project was removing a built-in wooden play set from the backyard. No children had climbed onto that platform in years. I was tired of watching it accumulate stray cats and pine needles. We offered it up on a neighborhood app to anyone willing to take it apart and move it. The young man who came to claim it saw we also had a patio swing for sale. In exchange for the swing, he did a series of outdoor repair projects that were too much for us to handle. I think we both gained on that letting-go episode.

#### **PRESERVING HISTORY**

Letting go became a spiritual practice as I shifted my focus from what I was giving up to how it might bless someone else. Before the COVID-19 pandemic

and the stay-at-home precautions, I spent an afternoon at a genealogical library scanning a series of old photographs affixed to cardboard. Some of the photos dated back to the mid-1800s. When I was done, I asked the librarian if I could leave these in their recycling bin. "Those are so old!" she said in a horrified voice. "You can't just throw them away."

"I've been here all afternoon scanning them so I can preserve them for the family," I said. "I have no room... We're downsizing. No one else wants them. Can you take them?"

Unfortunately she said the library was unable to accept them. So I contacted the historical society of the county where most of the people in the photos once lived. The society agreed to take them as long as I was able to identify the people in the photos. Thanks to my mother's attention to detail, I could. Now there was one less pile of photos to manage, and more history preserved where others could retrieve it.

I don't know exactly why I get so attached to things, but I do. I guess my things remind me of the important people in my life and the milestones on my journey from childhood to senior citizen status. It does get easier with time. I've learned to find joy in letting go, bit by bit. I enjoy the connections made as I hand over my beloved treasures to the next

person who will cherish them.

Every loss is ultimately a gain. Every gain requires some loss. The habit of letting go gets easier with practice—just as shedding extra pounds can make us healthier.

That's a good thing. 🌸

#### **SEEING "STUFF" THROUGH SCRIPTURE**

In the Gospel of Luke, we hear that:

- The disciples "left everything" and followed Christ (5:11 and 5:28)
- The twelve were with Jesus, as well as Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and "many others, who provided for [Jesus and the disciples] out of their resources" (8:2-3)
- Our possessions can give us a false sense of security, along with anxiety over their loss (12:13-21)
- God will "[lift] up the lowly" and "[fill] the hungry with good things" (1:52-53)
- To participate in the kingdom of God, we must accept God's invitation and share all we have with our neighbors (6:30-35, 12:32-34 and 18:22)