

Sometimes in our lives, we can all want control over things. But as we come to realize, the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray. But not so with God. While we might not always understand his ways, or why things happen as they do, what we can come to realize as Moses will as he approaches the burning bush is that when you let God's love in, it will be much like the bush, consumed and not destroyed. But it just requires a trusting in God that things will ultimately work out and that He has a plan for us. The question for us is how do we listen?

Some years ago Julie Garmon, a writer and mother of three, came to realize this with some wisdom she gained from a situation in which she nearly lost her yellow lab. She was going through a tough situation with an alcoholic family member who people had tried to help but it seemed like the plan to help was fruitless.

The call came one September morning, before she had finished her coffee. "Julie, he's drinking again." Her family member had relapsed. Not for the first time. She got off the phone and felt herself slipping too. Not by drinking, but by "stinking thinking," the distorted thought patterns that had

made her life unmanageable. Overanalyzing. Obsessing. Trying to control things.

Clyde, her four-year-old yellow Labrador retriever, came into the kitchen as she poured her coffee, prancing as much as a 100-pound dog could prance. He knew it was time for a walk, and she observed how he was always happy.

Julie drank her coffee, imagining worst-case scenarios involving this family member who'd fallen off the wagon. One phone call, and her 20 years of Al-Anon recovery work went out the window. She didn't want to think about the 12 Steps right now. She would rather just worry.

"Come on, Clyde. Let's go on a walk." He charged ahead of Julie to the back door.

Would she ever reach a point where letting go and letting God came naturally, she thought to herself. She got her iPod and decided to forgo Clyde's leash. He never wandered off, not even to chase squirrels. And they live way back in the woods on several acres. One can't even see their log cabin from the road. The gravel driveway is a third of a mile long, with

plenty of space to walk. So she stepped out into the stifling heat slipped in her earbuds and cranked up her music, trying to drown out her thoughts.

Julie talked to B.J., her Al-Anon sponsor, a few months earlier about another situation she had to relinquish. “Julie,” she’d said, “you have no control over how the world turns. God does that all on his own. Your job is to let go and trust him.”

Besides being Julie’s sponsor, B.J. is an animal lover. She was thrilled when they got Clyde. The breeder let Julie and her husband have him at only six weeks old. She thought maybe they had gotten him too young. B.J. assured Julie he’d be fine, and she was right.

Watching Clyde sniff the trees along the driveway, she remembered Cooper, their black Lab, who had died at 15. The two dogs were totally different in appearance and personality. Clyde didn’t have Cooper’s handsome show-dog body type. Barrel-chested with long skinny legs, he outweighed Cooper by 15 pounds. Clyde was top-heavy, a bit odd looking, but with a great personality. Laid-back and loyal. A dog who wanted nothing more than to be with his people.

“Clyde, you don't know how to worry, do you, buddy?” She observed watching her dog.

He grinned at her and kept walking. They got to the mailbox at the end of the driveway and circled back toward home. Maybe 50 feet from the road, she noticed he wasn't with her. How could that be? He always stuck close. She ripped out her earbuds. With her music playing so loudly, she wouldn't have heard anything else. Not barking. Not a car horn or brakes squealing. She looked around. No sign of him.

“Clyde, come!” He wasn't hard-headed. If he could hear her, he'd come running.

She rushed back down the driveway. Then she spotted him, limping toward her. His right hip swayed inward with each step. Blood covered his paws. He wagged his tail and collapsed at her feet. He must have been hit by a car.

He quivered. Breathed rapidly, in spurts. She knew she had to get him to the vet.

He was too big for me her carry. She had no choice but to try to get him to walk. "Clyde, come." He gazed at me with his amber-gold eyes and unfolded his gazellelike legs. Then he stood. "Heel," she said, patting my leg. Slowly, step-by-step, he walked with her to the car 250 feet away.

Each step of the way, guilt lashed at her. If only she had used a leash. Or watched him closer. Or not taken her iPod. Or been paying attention and not obsessing.

Finally, they made it to the car. Julie managed to get him into the back seat. She texted B.J. "Pray. On my way to the vet. Clyde got hit by a car."

Minutes later, they were in an exam room. The vet made no promises. Clyde might have a pneumothorax, an abnormal accumulation of air between his lungs and his chest wall, making it difficult for him to breathe. She wanted to keep him for X-rays and tests.

“Some dogs don’t survive this kind of injury,” she said. “He might also have a fractured hip. If his breathing worsens, we’ll transfer him to a larger animal hospital, where they can monitor him overnight. Call around four this afternoon. I should know more by then.”

Julie glanced at her watch. Nine-thirty. Before she left, she kissed Clyde’s head and said “I’m sorry, buddy. I love you.”

Back home, Julie replayed every detail of the morning—like she had done for years with family members—wishing she could have a do-over. By lunchtime, she couldn’t wait any longer. She had to go check on him. On her way to the vet’s office, her cell phone rang.

It was B.J. “Hey, kiddo,” she said. “You doing okay?” Julie filled her in.

“You know what to do, right?” she said. Julie replied, “I shouldn’t have been so careless. If only I hadn’t...”

“Julie, things happen in life that are beyond our control. It was an accident. You need to let go. Trust God with Clyde. No matter what.”

Let go and let God. How many times had Julie heard this—about family members, work concerns, other worries?

“You’re going to be okay,” B.J. said. “God’s in control.” It felt as if she was preparing her for Clyde to die. They said goodbye and Julie pulled into the parking lot at the vet’s. She asked herself: Did she trust God? Really trust him? No matter what?

Just for today, could she let go of Clyde and everyone else in her life? She looked at her hands clutching the steering wheel. She loosened her grip, took her hands off the wheel and turned them over. Palms open, facing toward heaven and prayed.

“Father, I don’t feel very strong right now. Will you help me release Clyde and my entire family to your care? You know best.” She walked into the vet’s office and went to the front desk. “I’m early. I just wanted to check on Clyde.” The receptionist led the way to the same exam room. “The doctor wants to talk to you. Have a seat.”

Whatever she says, whatever the outcome, Lord, I trust you. The vet came in. “Clyde is such a sweetheart,” she said, holding X-rays and several bottles of medication. “He has a pneumothorax—a collapsed lung—but no broken bones. That barrel chest of his saved his life. He’s one tough dog. He needs lots of rest, but he’s going to be fine.”

“He’s okay? Really? He’s going to make it?” Julie could hardly believe it.

“Oh, thank you! Can I see him?”

“You sure can. He’s going home with you.” A tech brought Clyde into the exam room. He took a few wobbly steps toward me, wagging his tail. He plopped his big head in my lap and licked her hands. Julie wrapped her arms around his neck.

In the car she called B.J. “Guess what? Clyde is all right. He’s with me now. Can you believe it?”

“Sure I can! Give him a hug for me. And remember, any time you feel the urge to worry or try to control things, you know what that means.”

“Yep. I need to let go and let God. Again.”

“One more thing. No matter what had happened with Clyde, you’d have been okay, kiddo.” Julie believed her. With everything Julie had, she believed her.

“We need to keep letting go every day for the rest of our lives,” she said.

“There’s no other way.”

Julie glanced in the rearview mirror at Clyde, who was looking right at her. He’d wandered off, and Julie had done the same thing. She’d taken a wrong turn, drifted from her Master’s side, but now Clyde and Julie were headed home.

In life, sometimes we take a wrong turn too. Or sometimes we think we know where we are going but don’t stop to ask for directions from the Master and just get lost. Sometimes the worst seems to happen too. But while in the nursery rhyme all the king’s horses and all the king’s men can’t put Humpty Dumpty back together again, in our lives, the King of Kings Himself comes to do that, namely Jesus. And our readings this week

remind us of a very important truth: God is in control. Like Julie, all we have to do is listen to the Master.

Moses in our first reading is a young man who has run away. Raised in pharaoh's court but probably not known to the pharaoh himself, he had a privileged life. But he slew an Egyptian who was mistreating an Israelite, of which Moses was of course one. He runs away and marries. But God has other plans for him to go back, and reveals Himself in the bush that is on fire but not consumed by flames. More on that in a minute. In the Gospel, the owner of the vineyard sees a tree that is fruitless; but the wise Gardner says trust the process, let me work more, and it may bear fruit eventually. What are the takeaways? Through it all, God is in control. Let go, let God.

For one, we can't think of God as someone we has a plan to punish the evil and praise the good from day to day. For instance, Jesus talks of a tower falling and killing 18 innocent people and an incident of Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. Pilate was known to be pretty violent. Jesus points out these were random victims. They were not singled out as great sinners who had a price to pay for their wins. The warning is that this can happen to anyone at anytime, so we prepare for the moment

we will meet God through repenting and growing closer to God. God did not send a car to strike Clyde to teach Julie a lesson. God does not give us sufferings in life because we did not do this or that. Rather, God is with us through those sufferings and we have to trust in Him.

Once we've got that down, as Julie and Moses both did, we let go, and let God. The bush is on fire but not consumed. Moses wants to go and check it out. But he is quickly told he's not in control when told he must remove his shoes for the ground he is on is holy. With shoes you can go anywhere pretty much; barefoot though is another story. He has to trust that he can go forward safely because God is there. And indeed, God will be there. He has no idea how these amazing plans of God will come out, wondering why Pharaoh would even listen to him. But he is assured that I AM, God Himself will be with Him. Millions of people have asked the age old question why do bad things happen to good people. But we look to our lord Jesus and see that the worst thing happened; He died; but this led to the Resurrection as the Father raised Him up. The Son trusted in the Father, and we need to have that same trust too knowing that no matter what happens, God will never abandon us. We must think of ourselves as the burning bush - God's

love surrounds us like a fire and does not destroy us, but makes us more brilliant.

It's also important to remember that sometimes the manure in our life (what the Gardner uses to help the tree bear fruit) can cause us some benefits too. We suffer through studying for instance but learn a subject at school. We face rejection in looking for work but learn to believe in ourselves and in perseverance. We deal with a tough situation at work or on the Homefront with a family member and learn patience. Indeed sometimes going through the valleys of life we look back and see how we emerge stronger.

Lastly, we prepare for the day we will meet God by striving to bear fruit. If God is in control, it means listening to Him and trusting in Him. It's often not easy to do. Moses has a difficult mission, but he does not run away this time. Neither do the apostles of Jesus and so many who have followed God. Life is difficult, but trusting in God there are so many ways we can bear fruit if we prepare for that day when the owner of the vineyard comes around again by listening to the Gardner to bear fruit and become better people.

It's no secret that like Julie I am a dog lover. I think about Kirby, my large friend for 7 plus years who I lost in the fall, every day. Lately it has been a little more tough I think with the snow melting as I want to walk him again, and living alone when you come home to a silent house and don't hear the sound of a large dog bounding up the stairs when you open the fridge or laying on top of you as you watch a game, these are the things that get to you. When a person got in touch with me a couple of months back who had a situation with a 7 month old English Cream golden retriever named Vinny and I met him, I thought it would be a perfect situation. And I met him a few times, brought him home, but while he was very loving to me he was also very scared as he hadn't heard traffic before, was out of his element the first time, and had a few accidents. Were he a rescue he'd still be with me. But as his breeder is also a trainer and works with dogs, she came out to the house, coincidentally just after he had another accident and all the windows were open, and commented how in her line of work she knows smells, and that was the smell of stress. We walked him to the church and she saw he was quite nervous and hadn't acted that way before, and so we both agreed it would be best for him to be in a new home with a fenced in yard situation and get more socialization skills. She also said a dog would work great where I live even with no fence, just not Vinny, and probably a

rescue who is a young adult will fit in great or a retiring breeder. I have no doubt the time will come, but having the joy of a golden retriever in my lap again was truly a wonderful feeling. Putting away the dog beds and toys wasn't. But God indeed does have a plan, of that I'm sure. Vinny will have a great home, and I am pretty confident a new large furry friend will enter my life later this year. And even though I think of the pain of not having Kirby there or the day I lost him, I also think of the joy he brought me but more importantly all that he taught me too in making me a better person. Perhaps that's one reason "dog" and "God" contain the same letters. But I also know that just as Kirby changed me into a better person, far more so does God do that. On my end though I just have to trust in His plan, and let Him call the shots. Because when I do, I will bear fruit and be changed from being a sinner into being a saint. So let God be in control. Let His love in. Trust Him. Because when you do, His love won't destroy you like fire would typically destroy, it will transform you in ways you couldn't even imagine.