

# When Do You Give Up?

July 6, 2014

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There was a comic strip that most of woke up to for many years, actually I think they are still printing it long after the death of its creator, and that comic strip was and is *Peanuts*. Charles Schulz' world of young children who are trying to figure out the world and themselves. Its main character is Charlie Brown and Charlie Brown spends most of his life pretty discouraged. Life, for the most part, does not go well for Charlie Brown. If something can go wrong it will go wrong for Charlie Brown. If he flies a kite it will end up in a tree. If he has a crush on the little redheaded girl, it will remain unrequited. If he is pitching for his baseball team they will lose by historic margins. And about once a year, usually in the fall as I remember, the Sunday comic strip would feature the classic test of personalities between Lucy and Charlie Brown when Lucy offers to hold the football for Charlie Brown so he can kick it. Now as soon as you read the first panel of this strip you know how it's going to end. It will end with Charlie Brown on his back having had the football pulled away by dear Lucy. You know its going to end that way. And as far as I know it never turned out any other way. And it always starts out the same way – with Lucy promising and assuring and providing some evidence of her good faith – and Charlie Brown taking the bait and then WHAM! In one strip Lucy even offers a written and supposedly binding contract – a signed document – that promises she will not pull away

the football. Charlie Brown thinks he has an ironclad commitment – only to find out that the document had not been notarized.

Now every time that strip appeared it left it to us to wonder – who is Charlie Brown really? Is he a chump? Is he just one of those losers who never gets it, who allows the world to roll over him and chew him up and spit him out? Is he one of those naïve characters who doesn't quite get the real world? Or – to the contrary – is Charlie Brown one of those endangered species that just doesn't want to give up? He doesn't want to give up on the world, he doesn't want to give up on his friends, he doesn't want to give up on Lucy? As long and as often that the kite ends up in the tree, the mailbox stay empty of love notes from the redheaded girl, and the football keeps getting pulled away – Charlie Brown never lets go of the remaining ounces of hope that maybe, just maybe things will be different next time.

You might think the same way of a Chicago Cubs fan. The Chicago Cubs have not won a World Series for 105 years. Five generations have come and gone and the Cubs have not brought home the World Series trophy. We may have in fact come to that moment in history where it can be said that there is no true Chicago Cubs fan alive today who can say the Cubs won a championship during his or her lifetime. That's amazing. The longest championship drought of a professional team on the North American continent. And yet on any given day at Wrigley Field 30,000 to 40,000 fans show up at the Friendly Confines to hope beyond hope that this may be the year. Every September they say maybe next year and every April they say maybe this year. Right now they're in last place ... so this year isn't looking so good. So are these Cubs fans chumps? Or do they embody what is best about the spirit – staying with your team through thick and thin ... or should we say just thin?

No one wants to be a chump. No one wants to be accused of hanging in there too long.

I actually threw out the question on Facebook the other day and asked for comments: At what point, I asked, do we give up on each other? To my surprise I got about 20 responses and they were all over the map and all along the spectrum between the fear of being taken advantage of

and the need to protect oneself – and – the unconditional love and everlasting hope that keeps us from never letting go.

The fear of chumpness to never ending hope.

Maybe that is what was on Peter's mind when he asked Jesus on the topic of forgiveness, "How many times must I forgive?" And so as to calculate the limit between grace, hope and chumpness – Peter throws out his most aggressive guess, "Seven times? Is that enough? Does that satisfy the heart of God?" And Jesus says, "Seven times, all right. Seven times seventy?" Now the mathematicians hear in that answer 490, but that's not Jesus' point. It is his hyperbolic way of saying chumpness is a part of the game. It is his way of steering the interpretation of the law away from an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. You remember that part of Sermon on the Mount – when Jesus says if someone asks you to walk with him a mile, walk with him two. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to him the other. If someone sues you for your coat, give him your cloak as well. Boy, talk about being a chump.

And, of course the truth is none of us has it on the inside to do those things do we? We really don't have it on the inside to turn the other cheek, to walk that extra mile, to forgive seven times seventy, we just don't have it in us. It's not the way we are wired. No one wants to be a chump. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.

So maybe that's why the apostle when he comes up with his fruit of the Spirit was sure to include the fruit of patience. For these are fruit of the Spirit. These are not fruit of human strength, these are not fruit of human will, these are not fruit of human capacity – these are fruit of the Spirit. And if there is anything that stretches far past human strength and human will and human capacity – it is this gift of patience. If there is anything that demands the work of the Spirit in us – it is this art of patience. When we are at that point of saying I have walked too far, I have forgiven too many times, I have turned the cheek too often – it is only the Spirit working in us that could cause us to go yet another measure. To find at least some creative way to not give up. To say that somehow

someway – whether we keep distance or hold close – somehow some way we will not give up on each other.

Makrothumia is the Greek word that Paul uses for this word we call patience. The Greek would say it this way – long suffering. Long suffering. The fruit of the Spirit is long suffering. How long is long, Peter asks. And Jesus says long. How long do we walk, and Jesus says long. How long do we keep giving away, and Jesus says long. Long suffering. That sure is not something we are wired to do either is it? Suffer. Suffer long with the other. Paul says, I want to know Christ in his sufferings. And if there was anyone who suffered with another it was the man nailed up on a cross saying, “Father forgive them for they don’t know what they were doing?” And those to whom he was extending this grace even in his death – what were they saying? “Chump”.

Perhaps not Peter. The one who went as far as the courtyard on that fateful day, but it was as far as he could go. Three times he was given the chance to keep walking alongside the Savior and three times he denied – only to receive Christ’s icy stare. Oh, we can only imagine that what Peter had to say was, “Please. Please be patient. Please suffer with me. Please forgive me ... for I don’t know what I’m doing either.”

So Paul too learns it the hard way. You remember the story of Paul and Barnabas and Mark who had been the original missionary team for the early church. Traveling to bring the good news of Christ beyond Palestine. But in that first trip Mark bailed from the team. He wasn’t up to it. He went home and left Paul and Barnabas to do the heavy lifting. So when trip number two came around – it was Paul and Barnabas and now it’s Mark wanting a second chance. Wanting Paul and Barnabas to take the chance. And Paul says, “Nuh, uh.” Fool me once shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. Sorry pal, you had the chance. You blew it. And Barnabas says, “Whoa, what about this patience thing?” And so probably in words he would someday come to regret, Paul says, My patience can only go so far. And so they split. Paul went one way and Barnabas along with Mark went the other way. With no record that Paul and Barnabas ever got back together again.

But what the record does show – as far as we can tell -- is that Paul and Mark did get back together again. In his last imprisonment Paul writes to Timothy and implores him to bring to him that one he once gave up on. “Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry.”

At what point do we give up on each other? And to my Facebook question one of my friends responded with the answer perhaps all of us would give. Said he: At what point do we give up on each other? **Jesus' answer would probably be never. Mine would be somewhat less.**

Such is the difficult road of following the Messiah, the long suffering servant. Always room between what he would do and what we want to do. And in between – the fruit of the Spirit.

