
Letters to a Young Episcopalian: Relationship

This letter is part of a series of fictional letters by Canon George Maxwell intended for Episcopalians young and old who wonder what it means to be faithful in the world today.

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Dear Anna,

Your description of your last run of the day reminded me of Neo dodging bullets in *The Matrix*—everything moving in slow motion, you can see what's coming at you well in advance, you have plenty of time to react.

I think they call that an optimal state, but whatever it is, I can sense the joy you felt at being “in the zone,” of being connected to something larger than yourself.

Deer Valley is such a beautiful place, and I can imagine you totally absorbed in making your way down the mountain.

I am also remembering how hard you have worked to get ready for this moment.

Do you remember all of those lessons, and how many times you struggled to get it right?

You told me once that you even had to learn to recognize when you were in the zone, because otherwise you would just keep skiing faster and faster until you lost control.

I know that, when you talk about being in the zone, it's a physical thing. You are talking about performing at your best.

I think, though, that we can have similar experiences in other parts of our lives.

There are times when we feel like we are just in the flow of things. We find ourselves absorbed in solving a problem, or writing a letter. And, when we think back on it, we realize that there was a moment when things just seemed to come to us more easily and to be more fun.

I recently heard an interview with a botanist who talked about plants as if they were people – sentient beings, with the capacity to learn and remember things.

A first, it sounded strange, but then, over the course of the interview, it began to make sense. By refusing to treat the plants as inanimate objects, she was learning more about them than just how they work.

It struck me that we are made for relationship. And, when we look at things this way, we become more generous people. We find the humility and ability to respect others that are necessary to live life well.

It takes practice, but when we get it right, we experience more moments that feel like your last run of the day, being in a zone where everything just seems to flow, and where being generous feels as natural as you described your short turns.

Travel home safely.

Your affectionate uncle,
Ames

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