

I can do it myself!

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“I can do it myself!” We hear those words from children of all ages as they seek to establish their identity and power in the world. The words are good news to parents who wish their children to be self-reliant and capable within the world. But the words are not so positive with they are applied to caregiving and caregivers.

“I can do it myself!” It can be a statement of strength---of not allowing this time of stress to overwhelm and control.

“I can do it myself!” It can be an expression of inner courage, an expression of power, a belief in one’s own abilities to weather the storm. But those words can also get caregivers into spiritual trouble.

However, those words can be an inner cry which would be more accurate if “I NEED to do it myself” was stated instead. “I NEED to do it myself” or else I feel less of a person. Did I not promise ‘for better and for worse’?”

“I need to DO IT myself, or else I am getting old, and dependent and needy.”

“I need to do it MYSELF or else I am not following through on my responsibilities and thus am unworthy. What would people think of me?”

“I need to do it myself.” I need to change the undergarments. I need to wash the bedding. I need to provide the supervision. I need to do the cooking. Who else will do it if I fail? My family and friends care, but not as much as is needed.” I need to do it myself, because asking for help is a sign of weakness, of powerlessness, of a lack of personal fortitude.

But is all-of-the above true? Is it a sign of weakness to ask for help? I would submit that the opposite is true. It is not a weakness to seek the help of others. It is a weakness to say “I can do it myself” when inside we really know different.

Human being were made for each other. That’s why we live in families. That is why we get married, have friends, bear children. The human being is a social being, not an isolated, self-sufficient individual.

Have you ever read Mitch Albom’s book, The Five People You Meet in Heaven? In the book Eddie, a maintenance man who has died, encounters five people in heaven who help him to understand how interconnected we all are and how that interconnection brings meaning to all of life. Albom’s book reminds of us a often-forgotten point: “No man is a island, entire of itself.” (from a poem by John Donne). We need each other and to deny that need is to deny an essential part of a interconnectedness that makes us human.

“I can do it” is different than “I can do it MYSELF.” “I can do it” is a statement of resolve, of intention, of desire. But to “do it *myself*?” That denies our essential humanity, our need for each other. It denies another person from having the privilege of getting outside of themselves and their own needs and goals, and focus, if only for a brief time, on the needs of someone else. “Doing it MYSELF” denies a person the opportunity of feeling as fulfilled in serving another as we feel when we are doing the caregiving. “Doing it MYSELF” requires a caregiver to be stronger than they really are, to play a role rather than being oneself.

“I can do it myself.” Valid words when they are expressions of a reality but destructive words when they express a desire to be something other than who we are: vulnerable human beings who are interconnected with each other.