

Learning to Soar

In *Run With Horses*, Eugene Peterson writes about seeing a family of birds teaching the young to fly. Three young swallows were perched on a dead branch that stretched out over a lake.

One adult swallow got alongside the chicks and started shoving them out toward the end of the branch – pushing, pushing, pushing. The end one fell four feet below, the wings started working, and the fledgling was off on his own. Then the second one.

The third was not to be bullied. At the last possible moment, his grip on the branch loosened just enough so that he swung downward, then tightened again, bulldog tenacious. The parent was without sentiment. He pecked at the desperately clinging talons until it was more painful for the poor chick to hang on than risk the insecurities of flying. The grip was released, and the inexperienced wings began pumping. The mature swallow knew what the chick did not – that it would fly – that there was no danger in making it do what it was perfectly designed to do.

Birds have feet and can walk. Birds have talons and can grasp a branch securely. They can walk; they can cling. But flying is their characteristic action, and not until they fly are they living at their best, gracefully and beautifully.

Giving is what we do best. It is the air into which we were born. It is the action that was designed into us before birth ... Some of us try desperately to hold on to ourselves, to live for ourselves. We look so bedraggled and pathetic doing it, hanging on to the dead branch of a bank account for dear life, afraid to risk ourselves on the untried wings of giving. We don't think we can live generously because we have never tried. But the sooner we start, the better, for we are going to have to give up our lives finally, and the longer we wait, the less time we have for the soaring and swooping life of grace.

Peterson's observations are right on target. I'm grateful that in the centers of Life Care and American Lifestyles and in the work of Life Care at Home, our associates soar – not like swallows, but like eagles – in the daily practice of giving. It is the wonderful reward for our response to the mission in which we are engaged.

--Beecher Hunter