

# **The Five Things We Cannot Change**

Book by David Richo <sup>1</sup>

## **1. Everything Changes and Ends**

- a. “Nothing is perfect, permanently satisfying, or permanently anything. Everything falls apart in time. Every beginning leads to a finale. Built into all experiences, persons, places, and things is a life span. Our relationships pass through phases, from romance through struggle to commitment. Then they end with death or separation...Our bodies age. Our possessions deteriorate. Our memories wane. The world of nature changes too. Species of animals disappear. Earthquakes realign the continental plates. Seasons change. Even the rose will fade after her stunning debut.”

## **2. Things Do Not Always Go According to Plan**

- a. “Things don’t always go according to our plan, but a change in plans may be an example of synchronicity, the mysterious set of coincidental circumstances that lead us to a life fulfillment unguessed and unsought – other words for grace. We make plans expecting to be in control of what will happen. Perhaps we fear natural happenings, things turning out contrary to our wishes. We are challenged by life’s ‘mind of its own’ to let go of having things come out our way. This is about control... We can flow into the natural chaos of life, so untidy, so unpredictable, or we can try to order life fully by making careful plans... Making plans is an adult occupation, a feature of the healthy ego. In fact, though, life often does not proceed according to our plans.”

## **3. Life is Not Always Fair**

- a. “Life is not always fair, and neither are people, ourselves included. Sometimes we are taken advantage of. Sometimes we do all the right things and wind up losing. Sometimes we act cautiously and are nonetheless hurt. Others may be generous to us and yet we take advantage of their kindness. Or we may act with good intentions towards others and yet our efforts go unappreciated or are misinterpreted. The third given challenges our ability to grieve for the losses associated with unfairness... You win some, you lose some. The challenge is to meet our losses with loving-kindness, the commitment to act and think lovingly towards others, especially when they test our patience, or act hurtfully towards us.”

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<sup>1</sup> David Richo, *The Five Things We Cannot Change*, (Shambhala Publications, Boston, 2005), pp. 3,20,21,34,47 65.

#### **4. Pain is Part of Life**

- a. “A given of life is that there is a cost to everything, and suffering is part of the cost...We suffer physically, psychologically, and spiritually and we grow in those same ways. Suffering seems to be an ingredient of growth during every phase and on every threshold of our development. Yet suffering is not a device used by some power in the sky to make us grow. It is not a trip to the woodshed. It is not imposed but rather built into the very nature of change, another mystery that the ego keeps dismissing.”

#### **5. People Are Not Loving and Loyal All the Time**

- a. “Some people act dishonestly; some lie; some are hypocritical. Part of growing up psychologically and spiritually is noticing all this but without censure or retaliation. We do not willingly allow others to be dishonest or hurtful toward us if we can prevent it. If they are, we ask for amends. If all we do fails, we let go. If those we respect as teachers and models turn out to be hypocrites in their personal lives, that does not diminish the legitimacy of their teaching. An adult knows that the teachings are the teacher. The person who teaches is only a mouthpiece, and a piece is hardly every perfect. I appreciate the ferry ride even when the ferryman proves to be a rascal.”

Storytelling in small groups or personal reflection. One by one, each person shares their answer to the first prompt below. Then go to next question and so forth. A person can pass.

- 1. Share about a time in your life when everything was “changing” or “ending.”  
Share about a time when “Things did not go according to plan?”**
- 2. Talk about your thoughts and feelings when you hear “Life is not always fair”  
and/or “Pain is part of life.”**
- 3. Share an experience when a person(s) was “not loving and loyal all the time” to  
you. What kind of relationship do you have, or did have, with that person(s)?**

Check out and download more small group storytelling reflections and prompts at:

<https://lifesjourney.us/storytelling-in-small-groups-menu/>

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