

Learning to Live Well - IV

Faith

Learning to live well is an ongoing process in anyone's life. Growing and aging is something we all do and the more attention we pay to the process the better off we will be. In continuing this blog I will share with you another series of important words – Faith, Family, Fitness, Finance. These grow out of the progression of personal development presented in Learning to Live Well I, II, and III. They also involve more intensive work and commitment so they will be presented in a separate series for each word. Having thought about:

I - Probabilities, Possibilities, and Productivity

II - Persona, Persistence, Perseverance

III - Survival, Security, Significance

I hope you will be challenged to continue growing in your life in the areas of Faith, Family, Fitness, Finance.

Faith:

When we speak of faith most people probably think about religion. While faith may be a key factor in any religious setting we should not forget the broader aspect and importance of faith in our lives in general. Can you imagine a life without confidence or trust in others and ourselves as well as in our governments or communities? Without such conviction or assurance we probably would not have the confidence necessary to make desirable changes to move forward and grow.

Realizing the probabilities and possibilities for productivity that life espouses and becoming aware of who you really are is a start. Then with the desire and persistence to persevere toward a brighter and more prosperous future you will be able to move from survival through security toward significance. To continue your life's journey you will need faith as you continue.

It is important to realize that anything that grows changes. Change is inevitable in our world and in our lives. Religion has the tendency to try and “keep the faith” and pretend that it will never be outdated by time or circumstances. In a real world this is impossible. Yesterday has passed, today is all we have now, and the future will primarily be formed by what we do today – as a popular phrase puts it: today is the first day of the rest of your life. Because yesterday is gone it does not mean that it was not right for its time and the human understanding of the era. One of the most important values of yesterday is recognition of what we surely do not want to repeat. As George Santayana said, “Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it” [http://thinkexist.com/quotes/george_santayana/]

Let me share this acronym again: (FAITH – Finding Authenticity In Today's Happenings), in order to further explain what I mean. The first part of faith is finding. We need to find principles that will authenticate basic premises for our thoughts and actions. We need to be sure that our premise is based on facts that are current in today's knowledge and understanding. We all remember what happened around the time of Galileo. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galileo_Galilei] The basic understanding of his time was that the earth was flat and was the central focus of the universe. When his experiments demonstrated that the sun was the center and the earth and other planets revolved around the sun he was excommunicated from his church and was placed under house arrest. If we are to consider ourselves “people of faith” we must be up-to-date in matters of fact that we propose to

support that faith. Too many people lose faith because it was not grounded authentically in today's happenings.

It is important to realize that faith depends on knowledge and truth. Those who practice what may be called blind faith are prone to demise and failure. The advice of many sacred writings can be summarized in this passage saying, "turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding..."[Proverbs 2:2] Astuteness and good judgment are enormous in saving us from a great deal of foolishness.

Not only principles change but also what may have been reasonable in the past may no longer be rational today. Tragedy often comes when people who believed they were being rational and reasonable learned the hard way that they were not. I do not think that I need to elaborate and belabor this point with all the recent tragedy in our economy alone. As things change so rapidly in our world now, it is very important to not only check the facts as we now know them but also to be cognizant of what changes might be coming and to be prepared.

Prayer may also be an important part of being faithful in the way we live. I believe prayer is mostly thoughtful doing rather than making a petition for God or anyone else to do it for you. This is not an original thought of mine but one based on what St. Francis of Assisi said long ago, "Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible". It was from this premise that I developed my acronym on PRAYER (Perusing Reasonable Alternatives Yet Expecting Resolve). When we are found to be faithful in perusing reasonable alternatives and test them by placing them into action we see how often needs are supplied for others and us. We are therefore admonished to, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."[Philippians 2:12-13]

Peace is another important approach in being found faithful. Soon, I hope, we will finally discover that war and violence do not solve or accomplish much that brings benefit. So many people talk about peace and wish that peace would come. The fact is that peace will never come until we become people of peace. This is not the work of God but rather it is our work through the power of God's presence in our lives. As St. Francis said, "While you are proclaiming peace with your lips, be careful to have it even more fully in your heart." When we begin to act like the people of God peace will come.

PEACE - People Energizing Alternatives Causing Equality.

It doesn't take much faith to make this happen. Scripture tells us; "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."[Matthew 17:20] The point is made that the mustard seed is the smallest of seeds but that, when it is planted, it grows into the largest of trees. Nothing is impossible when we move forward with authenticity or put our prayers into action or when our hearts are filled with the energy of peaceful alternatives that cause equality.

Faith must also include hope. In Christian Scripture we read, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for."[Hebrews 11:1-2] People are truly lost when they no longer have hope and lack what everyone needs to move ahead. We need to make hope a habit in our lives and continually practice open and

productive exploration. If you have been reading my blog on Learning To Live Well you have seen this acronym for HOPE before:

HOPE – Habitual Open Productive Exploration

It is only when our lives are filled with these inward and invisible grace(s) that we continue to demonstrate the outward and visible signs in our actions that bring exciting and necessary changes for today and tomorrow. That recalls another acronym you have heard before from me:

GRACE – God’s Recreational Activity Causing Excellence

Faith and all that it reflects is very important if we want to grow and enhance our lives. We need to be faithful, or to be full of faith, to move forward in living well. There is no need to denigrate the past or deny the validity of what was understood in former times. We simply need to restate our principles so that they are faithful to today’s understanding in language that transmits their expression for our time. Perhaps this quote from an anonymous retired bishop may express my point with brevity; "The older I get the more deeply I believe, but the fewer beliefs I have." Being faith-full to me is one of the more important aspect of growing in one’s faith.

In closing my thoughts on faith, an example of a simple and comprehensive modern creedal statement for Christians today may be seen in this statement from our brothers and sisters in the New Zealand Church of the Anglican Communion:

You, O God, are supreme and holy.
You create our world and give us life.
Your purpose overarches everything we do.
You have always been with us.
You are God.

You, O God, are infinitely generous,
good beyond all measure.
You came to us before we came to you.
You have revealed and proved
your love for us in Jesus Christ,
who lived and died and rose again.
You are with us now.
You are God.

You, O God, are Holy Spirit.
You empower us to be your gospel in the world.
You reconciled and heal; you overcome death.
You are our God. We worship you.

A Liturgical Affirmation from the New Zealand Prayer Book

To this end I offer a priestly blessing that may help you to see and acquire a deeper understanding to continue growing vigorous in faith:

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God's love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.