

## Learning to Live Well - V

### Family

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. As we continue 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.

#### Family:

Just what is a family? If you look at different areas of our own country and around our world you will see that there are probably no two families alike. And yet, there is no denying that family has an important place in each of our lives; some form of family has existed almost as long as the history of humankind. Family is important because we all have come from some kind of family. The following definitions from the dictionary will help demonstrate some of the characteristics that make up what we may be talking about when we use the word family:

1. group of relatives  
a group of people who are closely related by birth, marriage, or adoption
2. people living together  
a group of people living together and functioning as a single household, usually consisting of parents and their children
3. lineage
  - a. all the people who are descended from a common ancestor
4. offspring  
a child or set of children born to somebody
5. group with something in common  
a group whose members are related in origin, characteristics, or occupation
6. related languages  
linguistics, a group of languages that have a common origin

The most common one that we think of is probably number one – group of relatives as a result of birth, marriage, or adoption. But family is much more than that. While definition number one is surely primary since we would not be in this life without a mother and father, we would not grow up well without parental loving care. Whether we were chosen by adoption or had only one parent we recognize the dedication it takes to make possible our growing toward maturity.

The other definitions may be considered exceptions but, whether we like it or not, divorce and other factors are becoming more prevalent in our present world, in this country and many other places. People living together in a variety of family types are increasingly common. One's progeny may

come from an unwed mother, a single mother by artificial insemination, or through special arrangements by same-sex couples. There are still cultures that allow polygamy or polyandry that existed throughout history in which family members are related in a diversity of ways. More people marry today into linguistic groups that are different from their own while others marry because of their common language or dialect.

Anyone who is familiar with the Bible should be aware of the many kinds of relationships that existed among those who worshipped God in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Some, who never married, both male and female, were significant persons among their communities. Others, especially in the latter periods of biblical history, were united like many of our husband and wife families of today. The majority of biblical history includes many who practiced polygamy and who were prominent leaders. Abraham eventually had a son with his wife Sara, but he also had a son with Hagar who was Sara's servant. [Genesis 16] Sara's son Isaac became the progenitor of the Hebrews while Hagar's son Ishmael became the progenitor of the Arab nations. The most famous of Hebrew leaders who had numerous wives and concubines was David's son, King Solomon. [1Kings 11:1-3] David, a king who ruled over all the twelve tribes for quite a few years, not only had several wives but also took a wife from one of his generals whom he had murdered to cover his lust.[2 Samuel 11] Their style of family did not seem to interfere with their ability to accomplish great things and were seen to serve the people of their tribes and nations very well. As long as they were basically faithful, loving and kind, even though they were not without faults, God seemed to be pleased to support them as leaders.

When Christians look into the New Testament we notice that Jesus, whose words and example we follow, was probably not married. As a former ordained Baptist minister I remember how difficult it was for me to continue in that communion as a single male. It is not uncommon for most Protestant denominations to prefer, if not require, that their clergy be married. If they are not married it is very clear that they must live a strict celibate life as a single person. It is mandatory in the Roman Catholic Church that their clergy can only be male and must live a celibate life to continue as a priest. To keep this portion short for this Blog, I will briefly site other variances among those who were closely related to Jesus. There are a lot of questions about Jesus' family from the relationship of his mother and father to whether or not they had additional children who were true brothers and sisters to Jesus. Most Protestants are comfortable that Jesus had brothers and sisters while the Roman Church questions that possibility since they firmly believe that Mary had no other children and was a perpetual virgin.

Many of those who closely followed Jesus and were, in many ways, his extended family and did not have unions that are similar to what many people consider a true family in today's customary sense – the bond of one man and one woman (for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, until we are parted by death). We know Peter was married because we are told that Jesus healed his mother-in-law, but what about the rest of the disciples? His best friend, Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead, was living as a family with his two sisters, Mary and Martha.[John 11] There is no mention that any of the three were married nor were other significant family members mentioned at his death. Mary Magdalene, to whom Jesus first appeared after his resurrection and from whom it was said he cast out seven demons, presents many questions, even to this day, about her relationship to Jesus in his life and death.[Mark 16:8-10] Throughout the New Testament there are many important people like Paul, Barnabas, and many others about whom we know little or nothing about their families.

Throughout human history, secular and religious, there is a great assortment of human and family relationships. Some of them have diminished or no longer exist while new customs continue to develop in today's societies. The obvious fact, however, is that people need relationships of one kind or another in order to succeed and propagate. Barbara Streisand made the following song popular that celebrates people needing people.

People, People who need people  
Are the luckiest people in the world ...  
Lovers Are very special people  
They're the luckiest people in the world  
With one person. One very special person.  
A feeling deep in your soul,  
Says you are half now you're whole,  
No more hunger and thirst.  
But first be a person who needs people,  
People who need people  
Are the luckiest people in the world.

[ [http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/barbra+streisand/people\\_20012973.html](http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/barbra+streisand/people_20012973.html) ]

Interdependence is perhaps the best way to describe what I believe is most important in human relationships. It is basically people needing people who are the luckiest people in the world. We do not appreciate being dominated by those who would try to keep us dependent nor are we pleased with people who consistently act independently and ignore us. Since the concept of human relationship and family are not static in our history or society, I suggest the following acronym as a summary and comprehensive way to describe interdependence and family:

**FAMILY – Faithful Allegiance Mid Interdependence, Love, Yearning**

Let us look at how Nature and Nurture bring our history and twenty-first century models together and why family is so important to us. I think we can all agree that history denotes an increasing and dramatic change in the way people live and act today. In the past people might refer to the “four corners of the earth” but our view of the earth has distinctly changed. For a long time people thought that the earth was flat, the gods were above the canopy of the sky and the nether world was below. In our present view of nature we know that the earth is a globe and, along with other planets in our solar system, revolve around our sun. Most everything in the Universe is global and moving about in spins and orbits. Now that our world has grown significantly smaller with the ease of travel and the World Wide Web, we can see a variety of families in diversity of relationships in various cultures and places. Marriage, the common term for how we formalize families, also has many varieties of custom around our globe. Maybe we can agree that the most important aspects of marriage and family are faithfulness and allegiance without stereotypic definitions.

Perhaps then, nurture is the primary key for global interdependence with a loving and continual desire for each other in a diverse assortment of communities. The importance of the individual that makes up the core of all human relationships is the primary source for faithful, loving, yearning and allegiance. It begins with each of us and grows globally in value and intensity as various communities of people come together. An example of such nurture and the personal commitment to affect such

demeanor in our lives today is expressed in two of the six questions asked in the Liturgy of Baptism in the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church:

Celebrant Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?  
People I will, with God's help.

Celebrant Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity  
of every human being?

People I will, with God's help.

[pg. 305, The Book of Common Prayer, The Episcopal Church – The Seabury Press, New York, NY]

The basic intention of these words are clearly expressed by so many religious and non-religious alike but the actions therein expressed are too often missing in the events of our lives. We say that we believe in family and want family but we, too often, do not live family. How often do most of us fall short of caring for our neighbors as we care for ourselves? With what consistency do we strive for justice and/or peace among all people? With what diligence do we respect the dignity of every human being? No wonder we do not live in a world of peace. Until we learn to practice what we desire or intend in human relationship why would we expect it to be?

#### PEACE – People Energizing Alternatives Causing Equality

This is the only way peace will come to be a part of our individual and community lives – we must become people who practice peace as noted in the above acronym. In order to bring lasting peace we need to be at peace within ourselves, with all those with whom we live, along with all life in the universe. To live in a peaceful world we must begin to live interdependently using our energy and creative alternatives to cause everything and everyone to be in harmony.