

Rev. Paula T. Webb

TIS THE SEASON TO...WHAT?

Tis the Season to be jolly, happy, excited, mindful, prayerful, spiritual, religious, peaceful, loving, caring, compassionate...and?

At this time of year, many people are filled with hope, happiness, anticipation, and, quite possibly a sense of longing. Longing for renewed relationships, longing for what might have been, longing for a more peace and love-filled existence. And as they search their hearts and minds and those feelings, they may feel a sense of obligation toward others. An obligation toward others they may have decided not to speak to, not to associate with (or vice versa) ~ in essence, others they do not have in their lives for whatever reason or set of reasons. This may include a family member or several family members, this may include an old friend, this may include neighbors even include co-workers. It doesn't really matter "who" they may have chosen to exclude from their daily life, it only matters that they made that decision ~ made that decision which was the best decision for them.

You may know what I am talking about in your own life.

You might ask, what is the point of talking about this during the Holidays? A time of getting together with families, friends and sharing joy together? What I am getting at here is simple, and will explain through two good examples.

During this Holiday Season, and it doesn't matter what faith you may subscribe to (or not), just about everyone begins to think about, or re-think, shall we say, any type of relationships that, for whatever reasons, have not turned out or worked out the way you may have intended or wished.

This is only natural as we are surrounded by songs of peace and faith-related scenes depicting some of the world's greatest moments in history from a religious perspective. Again, it doesn't matter what faith or religion you believe in ~ it would be difficult for any person to not think about relationships that are no longer working or in existence.

However, that is not to suggest that you "should" try and re-kindle, or repair any type of relationship that you no longer have in your life. Quite the contrary! When a relationship ends, it simply ends. Whether it was with a harsh word, or it simply faded away, it doesn't matter. Some relationships are meant to "expire" shall we say. In other words, they serve a purpose, and when that purpose is complete, then the connection is broken. This is not something bad, or negative, it just is what it is. This is simply life dear readers!

“Let us see to it...that our lives, like jewels of great price, be noteworthy not because of their width, but because of their weight. Let us measure them by their performance, not by their duration.” *Seneca*

I am sure you can think back to a time in your own life where a friendship simply faded out of your life ~ it may have been a childhood friend, a college buddy ~ and as your lives went different directions, so did the relationship. There was no more commonality to keep it connected, and so it ended.

That is not to say that the friendship wasn't a good thing, that it wasn't comfortable while it lasted. It simply means it lasted while it lasted, and then it was over. Not unlike any job you might have had. I am sure any of you reading this can remember a job or maybe even several jobs you had when you “knew” that position was done or completed, and it was time to move to another one. The job may have provided you with a certain level of skill or expertise, but it had its limits and you knew when it was time to move on. Relationships are no different!

The only thing that seems to make relationships different is that others tell us “how” to manage our relationships ~ whether they are involved in any of them or not. Many talk show hosts are very good at telling others to “own” their relationships. Sorry, but I don't buy what they say. When a relationship is over ~ whether it was good, bad or indifferent ~ it is over. Period. And it is ok to let it go! This is what I call “Practical Spirituality,” and what I teach in my programs. *(For more information on my programs, please feel free to contact me.)*

OUR FIRST EXAMPLE

I have a cousin who knows I no longer have contact with my sisters, but regularly tells me to talk to them and be a “good” Christian. The reasons I do not have any relationship with my sisters are varied and long, too lengthy to go into here. Suffice it to say, after years of being bullied by them emotionally, I made the decision to stand up for myself. At that time, I explained to my sisters that I would no longer tolerate their negativity, however, if they wanted to “start from scratch” and begin a new relationship and get to know each other again as if we were strangers, I would be happy to do that and see where it could lead us to.

This was met with a three-page written negative diatribe from my sisters, personally attacking not only me, but my husband in very nasty terms. These types of emotional bullying events were the norm for the most part with my sisters and therefore, I made the decision years ago after receiving what I consider that “final” message from them, to not have any relationship with them from that point forward.

Do I miss them you might ask. Not one bit. To be honest, it was quite a relief to “let them go.” And that is simply what I did ~ I let them go. I continue to wish the best for them and in the same vein, I continue to wish the best for me ~ *first*. And what is best for me is to have nothing to do

with them. This decision to let them go of course, was done through months of reflection and prayer ~ the decision was not made overnight. What I had to do was weigh what they brought into my life. Was I happy whenever they called? No. For the most part, I dreaded hearing their voices, not knowing what they would accuse me of, or lash out at me about, or demand from me. And so, when I weighed the pros and cons ~ just like any job or project I might take or consider doing ~ I had to realize that they brought me little but anguish for many years. And the best thing for me, again, was to let them go.

“To thine own self be true.” *Hamlet – Act 1, Scene 3*

Do I feel bad about not having any sisters in my life today? Not at all. They rarely provided me with love or affection except when they wanted something and if what they wanted was not given by me, whether right then or at all, I received more emotional bullying, mental pain and anguish. Now before you think I am attacking them, keep in mind, that is just *who they are*, and I am not judging. I am simply stating fact. Quite possibly they are very insecure and that is why they feel the need to lash out at others, as I am sure I was not the only one they bullied. In my book “[Championship Spirit](#)” which addresses bullying and how to overcome the lasting effects to become a success, I write about how most bullies are weak and afraid themselves, and that is why they bully others, so no one knows how insecure they really are.

So, even during this time of peace and remembrance and hope for the future ~ it is still a good thing for me to have no contact with my sisters. This is something I am completely at peace with and have been for over 20 years. In the meantime, I have been blessed with a number of “chosen” sisters, most notably my best friends Bonnie Mengel, Stephanie Smith, and Helen Parker who are the embodiment of sisterly love. And especially Helen’s spirit, as my sister, will live on to the best of my ability, through my work and friendship with other chosen “family,” even after her recent passing because that is what she taught me as her chosen sister.

The point I am getting at here, is that if you find yourself in a similar situation, think about possibly doing what I did. Make a list of the pros and cons that person or people provide for you in your life, and if the cons outweigh the pros, then consider limiting your contact with that person or people to see how that feels, and then go forward from there. And of course, if changing your current ideas and/or actions doesn’t feel good, then continue on in the manner you are accustomed to. This is merely a suggestion to help you maintain your emotional and spiritual focus to accomplish your personal goals.

“You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand.” *Woodrow Wilson*

If you do not have any or little emotional and spiritual focus because other people in your life are disrupting or challenging that focus due to *needs of their own* then you will not be able to achieve your own goals, because you will constantly be battling with them over some degree of control

over your own life. These points are simply to remind you to do what is best for you ~ *first* ~ and not do something out of any type of obligation; especially something you may say or do and then eventually regret having done.

OUR SECOND EXAMPLE

I have an aunt, my mother's sister, who has always acted like she was superior to everyone else. I remember one of the first times I met her as a child, and from that first meeting, I never really liked her. For many years, I couldn't put my finger on why I didn't like her ~ except that she was constantly putting my parents down. She would make demeaning comments about my parents' home, furnishings, my mother's wardrobe, etc. ~ every time she came to visit. She has expressed personal attacks against my mother and father (even long after they both died), in almost every conversation I have had with her over the years. These attacks were always couched in "Christian" verbiage to make her look better than others.

This same aunt chastised me for years about not doing my Christian duty by "making" my mother quit smoking. As far as I was, and still am, concerned, I was not about to "tell" my mother to do a thing ~ much less quit smoking since that was something she enjoyed. Mother knew the risks as does every smoker, and when she did get diagnosed with lung cancer, she accepted her fate with grace and lived her last days to the best of her ability without any therapies or extraordinary measures.

After my mother passed away, my aunt would keep in touch on occasion, and we still exchanged Christmas cards each year, even though I had little desire to do so. However, I felt an obligation to maintain some sort of contact, basically due to what society expects from "family" situations.

I would suggest that a lot of people may feel a sense of obligation toward family members they do not necessarily like or want to be around, because they think or believe that other family members, as well as society, or their friends, would not or could not, understand their reticence or refusal to have some sort of relationship. And so they quietly continue on, wishing they had the courage to simply stop. But there is a moral conflict at play here as well to think about.

"How is it then, that the voice of God is not more distinctly heard by men? The answer to this question is: to be heard it must be listened to." *Desire` Joseph Mercier - Conferences*

We are taught to "forgive and forget," but when does that phrase become a detriment to our sense of well-being? Whether physical, emotional or spiritual ~ or all three? And, as I have written about in previous articles just what is forgiveness anyway? Does forgiving what we perceive as an injustice, of any sort ~ no matter how small or large ~ mean that we are required to put up with more injustice? That we are supposed to endure more emotional (and possibly physical) trauma? I don't believe so. In other words, how many times are we supposed to turn the other cheek? Indefinitely? I don't believe that is the way God set things up. That just doesn't make sense!

Look at it this way. We can see on the news regularly about wives that “put up” with abusive husbands. Why do so many of them stay in such terrible circumstances, we might think to ourselves, when the outcome may be life-threatening? One reason for staying (other than financial of course), why many of these women say they stay is that they were taught to forgive, and so they forgive their spouse for beating them over and over, because they believe that is the spiritual, and possibly “right” thing to do ~ and they believe by forgiving, their abusive spouse *will* change by their very forgiveness. And by forgiving, and feeling spiritual even though possibly only for a fleeting moment, that very well may be the only “sanity” these women have to cling to during troubled times. That gives them one little part of themselves that they can have, that makes any sense to them, and that they can feel good about.

Now, I am not saying *you* shouldn't forgive. And I am not knocking any religious teachings. Far from it! But what I am suggesting is that in order to live a spiritually and emotionally fulfilled life, you have to begin to qualify just what forgiveness means to you. Not necessarily what someone else tells you it should mean, including me! But rather, what forgiveness means to *you*.

You might ask, what does forgiveness mean to me? That's simple.

Forgiveness means taking a look at any perceived injustice toward myself, and rationally understanding where that injustice came from. Meaning, as I stated above, I could stand up for myself with my sisters ~ when I understood their bullying came from a space of complete insecurity about themselves. Once I knew they were insecure, how could I remain angry or hurt? I couldn't, and didn't. And as I realized it was not personal, that their bullying had *nothing* to do with me ~ I could make the decision, from a rational state of mind, to not allow it to continue any more. And as I wrote above, I wish them well ~ from a distance, but without any contact at all. That is what forgiveness means to me ~ and what is *best for my life*.

Getting back to the example about my aunt ~ I pretty much maintained some contact with her for years after my mother passed away, strictly out of some sort of familial and societal obligation. I admit I wasn't ready to put up with any backlash from others about why I would choose to not have anything to do with her. Up until three years ago. It was the beginning of January and my aunt called to say hello. As usual, I indulged her as I listened to her bragging about her adult children, and sat there waiting for her to stop talking. When she was done bragging, she made a comment that floored me. She went on to say that it was such a shame that “...*you and your sisters, and even your brother haven't amounted to anything...*” Not thinking I heard right, I asked her what she meant. She said that her “...*children were so successful, and it's such a shame that you and your siblings are not, but of course how could you be with the alcoholic parents you had?*” To say I was in shock would be an understatement ~ although this was nothing new, nothing unusual coming from her. I guess I was just done hearing these types of comments at that point.

Now, my parents were no different than most people in the late 1960s and early 1970s in middle-class America. My father was a business professional (a chemical engineer), my mother was a home-maker, amateur opera singer, Girl Scout® leader, PTA member, etc., and sometimes worked at local shops for extra income for our family of seven. We lived in a nice neighborhood, even

though our house was small, and went to very good parochial schools. I remember parties occasionally at our home with my father's business partners, and yes, most everyone at those parties had a good "buzz" on by the end of the evening! But they were always a happy and gay event, and certainly not something they did every night.

However, as I describe in my book "[The Complete Daughter](#)" for several years my mother did drink quite a bit ~ but this was only after losing five family members (including my father and both her parents) in less than three years and finding out she was financially destitute with three children still at home to raise, after loaning other family members money which was never paid back. So, yes you could say she had a drinking *problem* for six or seven years ~ but to be honest, who wouldn't after going through all of that? I don't know what I might have done in similar circumstances.

Mother ended up moving to another state to be close to this aunt after finding out she was broke ~ her own sister who never let her forget that she was destitute, that she was dependent upon her, and a huge burden to her. And all the while my aunt proclaimed that she was such a "good" Christian to take in "someone like my mother." I didn't know this was happening until mother became ill and so my then-boyfriend Mark (later my husband) and I moved her "home" to Chicago where we lived, and thus began her new sober and happy life. Once mother moved to Chicago, she quit drinking and became very involved again in life and eventually won yearly awards with the North Shore Volunteers for services to the community. She no longer drank ~ because she felt loved, was loved, was no longer lonely, and felt connected to us her family financially, physically, and most importantly, emotionally.

However, to listen to my aunt, who helped perpetuate mother's emotional depression for years with her belittling comments and stealing her inheritance, you would think that my mother and father were falling-down drunks who lived on Skid Row. As I said, I endured her trash-talk all those years out of some sort of twisted obligation (yes twisted in my opinion) ~ even though I really wanted to slap her silly! I would hang up after each conversation with her very frustrated and wanting to jump on a plane, knock on her front door, and give her a piece of my mind in person.

Getting back to the intent of this article ~ for some reason, when my aunt trashed my parents in that specific telephone call that last time three years ago, I realized I had reached my *maximum* tolerance. I said nothing, and quickly ended the conversation. After hanging up I knew that any type of response would be meaningless and moot, so I simply vowed to "cut her loose" and let the relationship fade away. And that is what I have done. And you know what? It feels *really good* not to have to listen to any nasty comments about my family. For three years now, I have not had to endure my aunt's negativity about anyone in my family. In other words, I no longer tolerate *anyone* demeaning my good name. And if that means I simply let them fade away ~ so be it.

“May all I say and all I think be in harmony with thee; God within me, God beyond me,
Maker of the trees, Maker of me.” *Native American Tradition - Chinook*

Now, you might say that I sound angry. And for years, I was no doubt about that I freely admit! Quite possibly, no different than you might have felt in similar circumstances. However, the more I researched my own beliefs, my own spiritual teachings, once I began to realize that anyone who belittles another is actually *insecure* themselves ~ then I could begin the process of de-energizing that anger ~ and end up feeling simple pity for the other person. And that is what I did. Once I realized that my sisters and my aunt were really insecure ~ I began to pity them and pray that they find the emotional security they feel is lacking in their lives.

In other words ~ I am doing *what is best for me* ~ and that is what God wants each and every one of us to do! Not hang on to some misguided notion ~ *created by man* ~ that we have to suffer at the hands of another, especially any family members. That is simply crazy.

But what we can do is, by the power of personal reflection, understand why the injustice is happening and then pray for those who inflict it upon others. This in turn gives us emotional and spiritual power, *power above and beyond those who bully* ~ and saves us in the way that God intended. By using the power of Free Will, and our personal spiritual practices, we can experience a sense of forgiveness and emotional freedom like no other. And that in turn makes us exceptional spiritual beings ~ beings that can make a great difference in our world.

“To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only means of life.”

Robert Louis Stevenson – Familiar Studies of Men & Books

The reason for this sermon here today is because I received a call from a family member recently and was told that my aunt is dying. What is she dying of? Lung cancer. *The very illness she said she would never get because she gave up smoking, and trashed my own mother about.* Now, I am sorry she has cancer. However, I have no desire to contact her. Does that make me a bad person? Not in my book. My aunt said everything negative she could to me for almost 25 years, and I am not about to open the door I made the decision three years ago to close. Now, you may be thinking, she might be a changed person because of her condition. That may be true. However, the point of this sermon is to help others understand that no one, including myself, should have to feel any obligation toward another person who has been mean to them for decades, just because their days are now shortened ~ *unless they choose or want to and not out of some outdated or inappropriate sense of obligation.*

Have I forgiven my aunt? In my definition, yes. I can look at her life now, and see how sad it is that she lived a life so completely insecure that she had to continually put down my family, and probably other people as well ~ to make herself feel good. How unhappy and desolate she must have been and felt for all those years! And, that dear readers, is the real tragedy. And the same

goes for my sisters. Years of frustration on their part ~ always feeling less-than, or not good enough apparently, which can make any life very gloomy.

And so, dear readers, God has given me the guidance to understand that it is not necessary for me to hear nasty or mean things from *anyone, at any time* ~ and to pray for those who are so insecure that they lash out at others. And, with His guidance, that is what I do.

“A religious man is guided in his activity not by the consequences of his action, but by the consciousness of the destination of his life.” *Leo Tolstoy - Confessions*

And that, to me, is not an obligation, but rather the true meaning of forgiveness, and the true meaning of the Season. *Tis the Season!* All Good Blessings!

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