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Hope - The Foundation of Health

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Your Life Your Health - The Examiner

"We interrupt this program to bring you this important announcement." We have all heard that at some time in our lives. Generally, it precedes some momentous, life-changing or tragic news.

Well, we now interrupt our march through the biochemistry and physiology of the human body, from which we hope to gain help in managing our health in order to live well as long as we live, to celebrate this wonderful, glorious day, which we call Christmas.

For some, this is only a secular holiday which is filled with love, happiness, family, gift giving and receiving, parties and great food. For others of us, it is a day to focus on the foundation of our faith - the belief and confidence that miraculously God became a Man in the Person of Jesus Christ -- and the historical results of that event. I personally love the holiday season because I enjoy all of the trappings of Christmas, while at the same time I celebrate the birth of my Savior, Jesus Christ.

Body and Spirit

As we have looked at our body's health, we have not forgotten that we are also a spiritual being. Over the past few years, we have addressed the following:

1. "Faith and Health - Prayer and Healing," November 15, 2001
2. "Hope - Health for the Soul," December 27, 2001
3. "Comprehensive Health Plan for Your Life Part IV: Exercising Your Spirit," July 3, 2003.
4. "Health and Hope: The Ten Elements of Hope and How They Apply to our Health," August 21, 2003.
5. "Aging Well Part IV: Thanksgiving, Gratitude and Mental Health," November 27, 2003.

Each of these can be reviewed below.

The Ugly Side of Faith or The Ugly Side of Distorted Faith

There is an "ugly" side to faith as well. Around the world, and even at home, we see people assaulting and even assassinating others in the name of their alleged faith. And, there is a side of faith which often has people of faith not attacking others, but attacking their selves emotionally and mentally. These are abrogations and/or distortions of any faith but particularly of faith which is founded upon the Old and/or New Testaments of the Bible which would include Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Peace on Earth; Goodwill Toward Men

On this Christmas day, I want to remind myself that the Namesake of this day, Christ, refused to lift a sword against friend or foe. He refused to fight those who disagreed with Him and He promised peace on earth and good will toward men. As we think of "aging well," nothing would contribute more to that health than "peace on earth and good will toward men." Think of it:

1. If men and women had personal peace, there would be virtually no homicides or suicides. And, unless you think we are talking about utopia, what if we start one at a time? If one of us has peace in our hearts and minds and practices that peace, and then another, and another? You see the progression.
2. If men and women had personal peace in their hearts and minds, the majority of sources of stress in life - stress which contributes to heart disease, depression and aging - would disappear. Divorce rates would plummet; anger and hostility in relationships would disappear; bitterness would evaporate. And, unless you think we are talking about utopia, what if we start one at a time? If one of us has peace in our hearts and minds and practices that peace, and then another.
3. If men and women had personal peace in their hearts and minds, envy and greed would be replaced by love and compassion. Can you imagine a world in which each person cared more for the benefit of others than for his/her own benefit? And, unless you think we are talking about utopia, what if we start one at a time?
4. If men and women had personal peace in their hearts and mind, worry, anxiety and fear would be replaced with hope, joy and anticipation. And, unless you think we are talking about utopia, what if

The Hope of Resurrection Seen in Nature

At this time of the year, emotions run high and are mostly positive. Love and charity, joy and happiness, goodwill and well wishes are common, even between strangers. But mostly, at this time of the year, in the midst of the natural cycle of death, as leaves die and fall to the ground, as plants lie dormant, seemingly without life, there is in the human mind, a sense of hope. There is hope that the spring will come; that flowers will bloom, that buds will blossom and that plants will sprout new leaves. Without doubt, there are also pressures which attempt to obscure these emotions, but sometimes, those negative feelings do not win.

All of these positive feelings and this sense of hope, with the expectation of resurrection, are part of the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Few things could have been more hopeless than Palestine at the birth of Christ, yet into that seemingly hopelessness was born The One Who would bring hope to the world. Few days were more depressing than the day of Christ's death, but as the story goes, "It's Friday, but Sunday's coming!"

Emotions Can Damage or Heal The Body

Often the emotions with which we are more familiar are a cascade, which, while mental in origin, result in negative physical effects upon our bodies. Those emotions start with

insecurity, or anxiety; they progress to worry and fretfulness. Finally, they develop into fears, phobias and often paranoia. Not only do these emotions restrict our actions and choices, they can seriously and adversely affect our well being. These emotions are often associated with anger, guilt and a sense of doom.

These destructive emotions know no socio-economic barriers. They affect rich and poor, educated and not, leaders and followers. Often people in the most meager circumstances have great joy due to hopefulness, while those in the most abundant circumstances have no hope, no happiness and no joy.

Unforgiveness: the root of fear, guilt and anger

At the root of many of the emotions which are destructive, particularly fear, guilt and anger, is a fundamental unforgiveness. Don't overlook the fact that these three emotions impact our principle relationships:

- Fear results from insecurity and uncertainty because of lack of faith in God;
- Guilt results from the inability to forgive ourselves and
- Anger is the product of the inability to forgive others

The convergence of faith toward God, hope toward ourselves and love toward others results in the simple act of forgiveness:

- First, God's forgiveness of us,
- Second, our acceptance of forgiveness for ourselves and
- Third, our extending of that forgiveness to others.

Forgiveness is not the acceptance of failure; it is not acquiescence to character flaws, or an excusing of frailties of the will, forgiveness is the affirmative acceptance of hope as a way of life for us and for others.

Beginning of Mental Health is Forgiveness

Forgiveness does not come by pretending that something doesn't matter, in fact, the more injurious an act of others toward us is, or the more serious a failure of our own is, the more powerful is the effect of forgiveness which stems from faith, hope and charity. The beginning of mental health and of recovery is not reform but forgiveness. Whether it is the bitterness and anger which comes from parental neglect, or the betrayal of a spouse, the restoration of mental health and healing comes from the conscious act of forgiveness, not because it is deserved, or even because it is sought, but simply because the convergence of faith, hope and charity in one's own heart demands it.

And the most powerful emotional and physical benefits of faith, hope and charity -- of forgiveness -- comes when the mental act of forgiveness is turned into the action of doing good for the one toward whom anger, guilty or fear has been previously directed. Jesus Christ both taught and exemplified the powerful impact of loving your enemies and of doing good to

those who had tried to hurt you. He showed by His life that the most powerful "weapon" was not "getting even" but in yielding your right for revenge and blessing those who hate you.

Forgiveness is the most valid human expression of faith

Forgiveness is a powerful expression of faith, hope and charity. It may be, along with gratitude, the most powerful action in human experience. And, forgiveness is the most valid expression of faith.

As you face the new year, you should resolve to exercise, to quit smoking, to lose weight, to _____, well, you fill in the blank, but if you want to do the most important thing in your life, accept forgiveness for yourself and extend forgiveness to others. Think of the person who has hurt you the deepest. Forgive that person. And, that person may be you. Forgive yourself. The release and freedom you experience will place you on a path leading exactly to where you wanted to go.