

**The Gift of Reconciliation:
The Healthiest Act of your life
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Your Life Your Health
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In only eleven days, “the most wonderful day of the year” will arrive. Even though the secularization of Christmas has diluted in most people’s experience its true significance, the approach of that “magical time,” fills most of us with the warmth of memories and with good feelings toward others. As we each look forward to giving and receiving, I think of these things in relationship to our health. My mental pictures of Christmas are a collage of many experiences. Two of those memories portray the ultimate gift which Christmas once gave, and which it can still give. That gift is one which will have more positive effect upon your health and well being than ANY other gift you can give or receive. It is the gift of reconciliation.

Among many, two images come into my mind when I think of Christmas. They both come from the cinema. One comes from a movie which reflected its time. And, the fact that it won the Academy Award in the year of its release tells us a great deal about the time. In the fall of 1944, when *Going My Way* was released, the world was still embroiled in World War II. Stability, meaning, family and reconciliation were on everyone’s minds.

One scene from that movie still haunts me; it still brings tears to my eyes. A young priest, Father O’Malley, played by Bing Crosby, had been assigned to take over a failing parish where an elderly priest, Father Fitzgibbon, had served for decades. At the end of the movie, having wisely and successfully helped make a transition in the leadership of the parish, Father O’Malley slips away unnoticed as the scene unfolds in which Father Fitzgibbon, approaching the end of his own life, having sacrificed everything in service to his calling, sees a small, frail woman shuffle towards him. As Father Fitzgibbon reaches out to embrace this sweet lady, his mother, whom he had not seen since he was a young priest, took his face in her small, wrinkled hands and kiss the son whom she loved so well.

For me, few things portray the beauty of Christmas as does this evocative scene. The passion and emotion which it contains transcends culture, race, religion and origins. It speaks to all of us. There are few gifts which will give as much as will your reconciliation with those from whom time and life have separated you. It does not matter whether you have been successful or not, the message of reconciliation is that it is you and it is your loved one which have value. We have been distracted, if not deceived, to believe that it is things and their accumulation which makes us worth being loved or desired. In actuality, our value is in our person, not in our possessions. Give a gift of reconciliation this Christmas; give a gift of yourself.

The second cinema is not a classic but it is just as significant. In the comic tragedy with its multiple subplots, Home Alone I portrays the reconciliation of Christmas. Kevin, the focus of the story, discovers that Mr. Marley, whom all the children feared, had been deeply hurt many years before. As a result of the conflict his son and he had not spoken for years. And, Mr. Marley was not welcome to see his grandchildren. Through a series of events, both Kevin and Mr. Marley learn about love, family and reconciliation. The penultimate scene of the movie shows Kevin looking through the window of his warm home after his family has returned and waving to his friend, Mr. Marley, who is walking his son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren through the snow into the warmth of his home.

It is not possible to imagine a gift which will last a life time as will a gift of reconciliation. Baubles and trinkets are pretty and they attract our attention, but no matter how spectacular, their allure fades with time. The “thing” which we thought would bring happiness loses its charm; it breaks, or it’s supplanted by a bigger and brighter bauble. But, a gift of reconciliation is transformative and can thus change one’s life forever.

Because there are eleven days left to Christmas Day, it is still possible to make it the best day ever. You still have time to reach out to that parent, that child, that brother or sister or that friend from whom you have been estranged by geography or by the gulf created by anger, grief or offense. It is not possible to erase from your mind the hurt another caused you, but it is possible to erase its effect. It is possible to realize that the value of a person and the value of your relationship with that person are exceeded by the price being paid by your estrangement from them. Sometimes the barrier which has been constructed over the years makes it seem impossible for it to be removed, but the power of a simple greeting such as “I love you,” can destroy that barrier and allow life to flow between you and your loved one again.

It is not easy to initiate reconciliation. Either in reality or in our perception another person is, or was wrong in our judgment, should they not be the one who initiates reconciliation? Yet, living with the consequences of estrangement exacts too great a toll upon us to make it worthwhile. The value of the offense will diminish with reconciliation until that which we could not forget is forgotten as the light of reconciliation fades it into oblivion. And, the health benefits of reconciliation are enormous. Whether it is in the relief of arthritis pain, chest pain, depression, anxiety, the aggravation of other chronic illnesses or in other ways, reconciliation often will effect positive benefits in our lives.

Christmas gives us the pattern of reconciliation. And, while I aggressively support the right of all to believe as they chose, I wish to affirm that while I love the gaiety and festivity of Christmas, it is the Person of Jesus Christ which gives meaning and purpose to Christmas. I believe that Jesus Christ is not only the Son of God; He is God. I believe that Jesus Christ did not come into existence as a result of His Father impregnating one of His celestial wives. I believe that Jesus Christ did not become a god because of the quality of his life. I believe that Jesus Christ has always been God and that His life was a product of his nature. I believe that He is eternal, never having a beginning or an end.

This is a concept which is beyond my conception but which is nevertheless true. I believe that while Jesus Christ occupied the offices of Prophet, Priest and King. Yet, He is not just One among many; he is THE One and all others pale in the brightness of His life. I believe that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died an atoning death and is alive today sustaining and loving us.

The miracle of all of this is that God showed us how to be reconciled for our own health's sake. The Bible states in Romans 3 that God loved us and reconciled us to Himself while we were His enemies, while we had intentionally tried to offend him and while we were actively rejecting his way. In the light of this example, there is no one and particularly no family or friend, with whom we cannot or should not be reconciled.

If you have read this far, you may think, "It sounds like this writer has had a personal experience with estrangement and with reconciliation." And, if you have thought that, you would be correct. Don't ever forget that estrangement is seldom an event; it is a process. In the same way, while reconciliation can be an event; it is most often a process. This Christmas love someone you have hated, or been angry with. Let them experience your love and embrace. The gift you receive will be the best you have ever had. Remember, it is your life and it is your health.