

THE FABRIC OF FAMILY

In a perfect world, family relationships would be easy for spiritual people. We would simply shower each other with divine love and let our lights shine. But families can be complicated. The good news is that we have spiritual tools to help us.

In this booklet, New Thought writers tell how they used spiritual principles and faith in God to bring about family harmony or to find strength for the journey. If you have been married or divorced, accompanied a parent to the end of life, had children or ever were a child, you will find stories in these pages that resonate with you.

You will read inspiring lessons from family role models who taught by the way they lived and sometimes how they died. Other family experiences are heartrending: recovering from a loved one's suicide, deciding whether to end medical treatment, or accepting the mental decline of a parent. Some of the writers have come to understand their families' painful choices despite the scars that were left. Others recount deep loves and shocking betrayals, and forgiveness runs like a thread through these stories.

As one writer put it, "Every family unit offers the equivalent of a doctoral program in spiritual growth and evolution—if only we will risk receiving it."

Families provide great challenges as well as incomparable joys. We hope these stories help guide and sustain you and those you love as you create a family.

Your Friends in Unity

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TO BEGIN: THE DANCE OF FAMILY

By Toni Stephens Coleman

How do we define a family? Given the broadest definition, a family is a group of people who are related and/or connected by ancestry, marriage, mutual interests, needs, or desires. There are as many types of families as there are people.

What makes a family thrive? In a single word: love.

As Unity cofounder Charles Fillmore writes in *The Revealing Word* (Unity Books, 1959), love is "the pure essence of Being that binds together the whole human family."

Our families of origin may evolve with us or may fade into memory as new people come into our lives. We may discover we are living many lifetimes in one incarnation. We may live in different family types that eventually evolve into a heartfelt fit for us.

It serves us well if we can imagine family life to be like dancing. Sometimes we are connected to a partner side by side, doing the same steps in line with each other. Sometimes we are face to face, making up our own moves, jamming to the music differently. Other times we are connected hand to hand, face to face, or body to body in a series of steps either telegraphed or learned. (Interesting that someone is usually willing to dance backwards.) Then there are times when we dance alone, letting the outer music or the inner rhythm guide us.

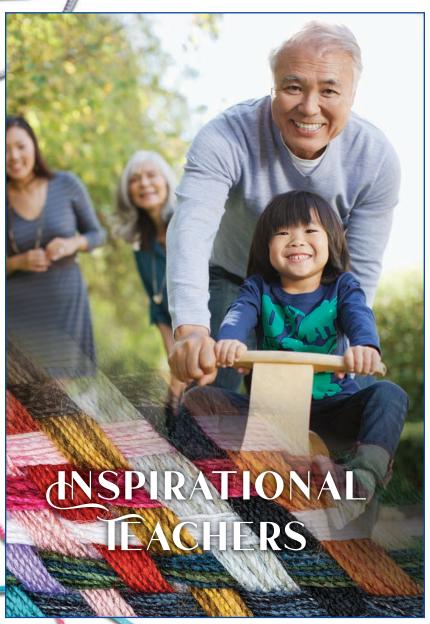
As with dancing, it is important to do your part to thrive in every kind of family, to join in the creation. Be present. Carry your own weight and be aware of the family as a whole. If there is discord, be the peacemaker, find common ground.

There is a concept taught in dance class and used all over the dance world called "LOD" or "Line of Dance." It means don't step on each other's toes! As soon as you become aware, shift your attitude into love and harmonize your moves with your partner's.

Other useful ideas from dance are to care about the people you are with. Listen and pay attention. Promote harmony with the music that envelops you and those around you. Share the space and take responsibility for yourself. Look out for your partners. Act respectfully and be graceful—that is, full of grace. Step into the flow of Spirit.

There are so many kinds of families today in part because people have found ways to thrive and honor and dance to their own inner music. One thing we know about the nature of Spirit is that God loves diversity! Whether related by birth or affinity, we are all in the dance of family, and we are all born to thrive. We just need to step lightly and lovingly!

Rev. Toni Stephens Coleman is minister at Unity Lincoln, Nebraska.



For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.—I Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)

THE COURAGE TO LEAVE

By Kurt Condra

Scan the family photo albums and in many clans, the photographer is notably absent from the historical record. In my family, that's Dad.

A journalist by trade, his images of our early years were excellent. This was back when reporters shot in black-and-white and developed their own negatives. His best were candid photos of authentic moments.

My parents' marriage was coming apart. Mom longed for the comfort and proximity of family and lifelong friends. Dad yearned for a sense of purpose that couldn't be fulfilled in the small town of their origins. His ambition and talent opened new doors to a wider world where his hopes and dreams could be fulfilled. He left us for a job 2,000 miles away in 1971, when my youngest sister entered kindergarten.

As a child, I couldn't understand how heartrending that choice must have been for him. I couldn't see the courage it took to follow the urgings of his spirit, nor the strength required to overcome the guilt and shame heaped on divorced parents, especially the ones who feel called to leave. I didn't appreciate the commitment required to remain a supportive presence in his children's lives, especially through our sullen adolescent years when kids would rather be anywhere than with their parents. Before, I could only see through a glass, darkly. Now, having faced my own pain around those events, I clearly see the depth of his courage, strength, and commitment.

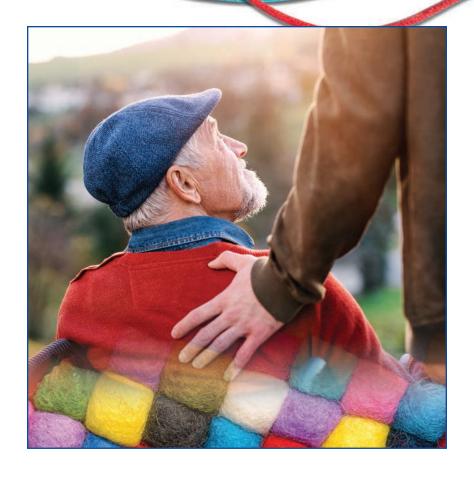
Dad's own adolescence was scarred by his father's alcoholism and his parents' divorce. He spent his junior year in high school in near isolation at a sanatorium, recovering from tuberculosis. It left him with a nagging fear that his life would not be long. So throughout his 20s, he worked to overcome that fear with a fierce determination to live full-out, pursuing every opportunity wholeheartedly and wringing maximum benefit from every experience.

So throughout his 20s, he worked to overcome that fear with a fierce determination to live full-out, pursuing every opportunity wholeheartedly and wringing maximum benefit from every experience.

When he was nearing 50 (and I, 30), I went to work in his editorial department. His team of award-winning editors and journalists was scattered across the country to cover every facet of the trucking industry. His connections ran the gamut from drivers and owner-operators to the C-suites of some of the world's largest carriers and equipment manufacturers, to state and federal transportation heads, even the halls of Congress.

Now in his 80s, Dad is long retired. The stories he reports are from his own life. He researches the most colorful ancestors from our family tree, fact-checking his notes with his older brother and cousins who grew up with him. To his great irritation, physical mobility issues hamper his golf game and limit his travel. Having circled the world, he now contents himself shuttling among California, Michigan, and Florida once or twice a year to spend time with kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids.

The camera and darkroom are long gone. Instead, he's curating an iPhone movie that, when the time comes, we're to show at his funeral. It will be the one and only album with Dad appearing in every shot.



In the meantime, I am immensely blessed by the knowing that my father and I now share. And I pray that in striving to emulate his courage, strength, and determination, I might inspire others as he inspires me.

Rev. Kurt Condra is senior minister at Unity on the North Shore in Evanston, Illinois.

LEARNING TO SAY 'THANK YOU'

By Beatriz Gallerano Bell

It is said that children learn what they live; certainly, adults too. I have had a clear experience in this regard.

When I met Frank, who has been my husband for almost 18 years, one of the things that caught my attention was that he thanked me for whatever I did. It didn't matter whether it was meaningful to me or not, he thanked me for it. Whether I made coffee, turned on the television, shopped for groceries, or opened the windows of the house—whatever I did, he would say "thank you."

At first this seemed a bit strange to me, as I was not used to such a wide and general expression of gratitude. I liked it. It made me feel recognized and valued in what I did.

People say you get used to the good soon, so I got used to it and, since it was something I liked, I began to imitate it. I began to be more attentive so as not to miss any opportunity to thank.

Over time I have been incorporating this generalized practice of gratitude, and I have come to understand that saying "thank you" is much more than acknowledging what someone is doing that favors or benefits us in some way.

To say "thank you" makes us aware of how valuable and important the presence of each being is in our lives. Sometimes giving thanks also helps us understand and accept how necessary it has been to live certain experiences, to go through certain situations, and to overcome certain challenges.

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Giving thanks helps us change our vision in relation to the circumstances now and even to experiences lived in the past.

Giving thanks transforms resistance into acceptance, complaint into recognition, pain into comfort.

Sometimes we may think it is not necessary, that it is excessive to express gratitude, but the truth is that gratitude is the magnet that attracts our good. The more we give thanks, the more we open our hearts for good to come in.

The more we give thanks, the more we open our hearts for good to come in. Gratitude is also a great transformer, like a converter used for electrical energy. The transformative potential of gratitude turns what we might originally have described as unpleasant, scary, or frustrating into an instrument for our growth and learning as we explore, find, and accept the blessing it brings.

That is not always easy, but we can be sure it is possible.

I have also noticed this grateful attitude is contagious. I see in my family that, day by day, this custom of giving thanks for everything has been incorporated by each one of us. Each, in their own way and in their own time, has been discovering the joy of being grateful.

A grateful heart is a receptive heart. It is more open to accept the good, to discover the gift and the blessing in everything. A grateful heart is more connected to our divine essence and makes it easier for us to follow our inner guidance.

Mindful of that, having made gratitude a way of relating to one another helps our family enhance love, peace, kindness, and understanding.

Rev. Beatriz Gallerano Bell and her husband Frank have a ministry in Córdoba, Argentina, called Unity Sembrando Luz (Unity Sowing Light) and oversee distribution there for the Spanish-language Daily Word, La Palabra Diaria.

FIRST LOVE: MY GRANDMOTHER

By Karen Romestan

Her birthplace was Charleroi, Belgium. My birthplace was Charleroi, Pennsylvania. Although the cities of our births carried the same name, they were a world apart. Yet a soul bond joined us together throughout our lifetimes.

She was Germaine LaFebvre Romestan, mother to Melvin Arthur Romestan. I am his daughter, Karen Lee Romestan.

She was my first human connection after Mom gave birth to me. You see, while she awaited my birth, Mom was diagnosed with tuberculosis. This was a death sentence for many in the 1950s, and at the tender age of 22, Mom was whisked away to be treated in a sanatorium. I on the other hand, along with my 2-year-old sister, was lovingly carried to Grandma Romestan's home to live for the next three years.

Having reared 15 children and now a widow, Grandma Romestan took on the task of raising my sister and me with love and tenderness. To hear the stories, we were always dressed in pretty, pressed dresses, and my curls were always neatly held with matching barrettes. Grandma's love was like no other in my life. Recognizing the unique and special relationship we shared has been a treasure through all my days.

Thankfully Mom survived many months of hospitalization and in time joined us to live at Gram's house. Eventually Mom was well and strong enough again to care for her family. We moved from Grandma Romestan's home to a home of our own.

I've heard stories of the difficult transition this move was for me, and I have faint memories of sitting at the bottom of the stairs at our new two-story home, waiting for Gram to come, my young mind wondering

if she ever would. I learned the resilience and persistence of love that binds us together through time and space.

From Gram, I learned the importance of faith and how trusting God could carry us through the harshest of times and the greatest losses we will ever experience in life. While baking bread together, I learned that all the strength I ever needed for life, I already had, just as she did. Cutting rhubarb, I learned that it is important to forgive people. "They're doing the best they know how to do," I recall Gram telling me. "We might remember the offenses against us," she said. "We can use the memories to make good decisions. But forgiveness heals our hearts."

With sayings such as "however you make your bed, that is how you lay in it," she enforced the idea that I am responsible for my decisions and I will live with the consequences.

One of the most important things Grandma Romestan taught me was to hug often and always to hug like you really mean it. Don't hold back on love and hugs. She taught me this not with her words but with her example. She hugged like no other in my life, and a hug was followed by a squeaky kiss on the cheek and, as often as not, a lollipop.

The presence of Grandma Romestan remains in my heart always. She is and has been for many years a guiding angel in my life. Her gentle love guides me through the monumental transitions of life and the small, tender moments. Her presence reminds me of the inner strength of my soul and the faith that sustains me through the many adventures of this life.

Grandma Romestan was the woman I bonded with at birth. In these, the senior years of my life, I am known as Grandma Texas to my grandchildren. Yet I bear the name Grandma Romestan to some of my extended clan. It is a breathtaking honor.

Rev. Karen Romestan is minister at Unity on Greenville in Dallas, Texas.

FAMILY LESSONS OF LOVE

By Bronte Colbert

Out walking my dog recently, I spotted a neighbor washing his car by hand. Intently focused, he cleaned each section with a soft cloth, a bucket of soapy water beside him in the driveway.

In that moment, there stood my father. It doesn't matter that the two men look nothing alike or that my father passed on nine years ago. I felt my dad's essence so clearly because he always washed his cars by hand. He instructed us kids to take care of the things we loved.

My yard chore was to trim the hedges, shears heavy in my young arms. Father told me to step back often to gauge my work and make changes if needed. This shaped my inner artist to recognize symmetry, form, and composition. He taught me the names of all our local birds and how to whistle in tune with them.

He taught me to recognize God in every part of nature.

The scent of cookies cooling on a metal rack brings my mother, Ruth, clearly to me. Every December my brothers and I mixed and baked peanut butter cookies as soon as she left the house for her annual Christmas shopping. That aroma mingles with the secret-keeping joy we felt by making cookies for her. She had the skill to act amazed and surprised every single year.

One of the kindest people I've ever met, my mother smiled and said hello to strangers. She was compassionate and truth-centered and taught me to look for the good always. Her hugs were abundant, the kitchen table stayed open for late-night talks when I was an angsty teen, and she encouraged my art.

She helped me see God in all people.

Long after her eyesight faded, Grandma Jo would sit and knit by the window of her single room, her German Bible close by. God was a fact to her, not a concept. For years she filled our lives with colored yarn turned into doilies, hats for Wisconsin winters, and mittens for sledding and skating. Then she took on bigger projects—afghans in vibrant blue, coral, and yellow to drape at the foot of our beds.

Some days when I sat with her at the window, handing her bright balls of yarn, she would forget my name. With love, I would remind her. She told lively tales of her childhood in Austria and the 1905 ocean crossing that brought her, brave and alone at age 14, to New York and then Chicago. Then I would retell our stories—the ice cream shop we'd



visit in her neighborhood and my first Disney movie she took me to see when I was 8. Now when I see sunsets blanketing the sky in coral, yellow, and blue, I see my grandmother.

She showed me what faith and resiliency are.

Of course, families and relationships are not only hugs and acts of loving-kindness. Feelings might get wounded, words may hurt, and negative actions or unkind treatment can linger in our minds and hearts.

I was blessed to have these three people and others like them in my life. I've lived through challenging interactions too—times when I felt I wasn't being heard, valued, or understood. Circumstances that seemed to block the positive progression of my life. Relationships that felt extremely challenging and hurtful.

Spiritually, we can approach life from a higher level. We get to choose what we think about and how we think about it. We can look into situations or relationships to discover what we learned. Are we stronger? Wiser? What is the blessing? How have we grown?

Finding new insights, we bless our lives and all the people in it. We move forward with confidence, faith, and strength.

Rev. Bronte Colbert is the minister at Unity Athens, Georgia.

PERMISSION TO BE DIFFERENT

By Evin Wilkins

I only ever knew him as Dusty. His given name was William but the thought of calling him anything but Dusty always seemed unnatural. I was never quite certain as to why or how he'd received his nickname. I just knew it had stuck.

Dusty was my uncle but he was more than that. He was also a family way-shower of sorts. Looking back, I realize it couldn't have been easy for him. Living within the confines of our ultraconservative, small Texas town was not without its challenges.

Dusty and I were both raised within a family and culture that practiced little tolerance for anything or anyone perceived as somehow different. Whether it was judgment about skin color, religion, or sexual orientation, tolerance and diversity were not kindly welcomed. My family viewed life as a man's world, and the white, heterosexual male was always the head of the household with no questions asked.

Questions about why or how things were done a certain way were never welcome because it was simply "how things were." Religion, gender roles, gender identity, sexual orientation, and race had already been defined, and we weren't allowed to question those definitions, at least not without a fight.

Dusty, however, always seemed to shrug off the notion that it was just "how things were." He'd ask thought-provoking questions during family gatherings—questions about race, sexuality, and religion. He'd often wink at me in delight when his questions resulted in uncomfortable expressions from certain family members.

I remember how Dusty often seemed to provoke anger in my father, just by his mere presence. For a long time, I couldn't understand why. As a child, I had always just assumed (and even been told) that it was due to their age difference. My father was 10 years Dusty's senior but as I got older, it became more evident to me. You see, Dusty was a gay man, and he didn't seem to care what my father or anyone else thought or felt about it.

I remember the whispers during holiday gatherings. Most of the men in the family chose to ignore my uncle, not deeming his interests worth discussing. Disregarding their ridicule, Dusty would ignore them and often break stereotypical family tradition by joining the women in their conversations. He always treated the women in the family with kindness and respect. He'd assist them in the kitchen or invite them into the salon he owned for a day of beauty and joy.

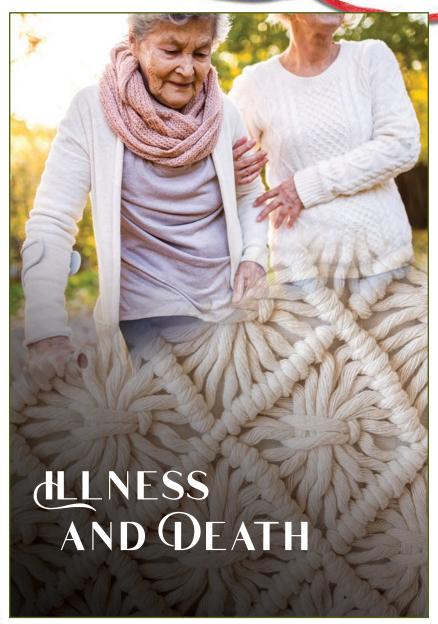
My father, often within earshot of Dusty, would speak of him with disdain, telling me that a man should never act in such a manner. Dusty never seemed to mind or allow it to affect him for he knew who he was.

In 2005, Dusty was diagnosed with lung cancer at the age of 46. He made his transition soon after but his legacy and the lessons he taught me are still very much alive in my life.

It was through him that I learned tolerance and respect. He taught me that it's okay to question the status quo and that old traditions can be broken to create new ones. Most important, he taught me that it's okay to be me in whatever form that takes. I can sometimes still picture his delightful wink and the joyful way in which he lived his life.

Thank you, Uncle Dusty.

Rev. Evin Wilkins is senior minister at Unity of Madison, Wisconsin.



THE POWER OF A FAMILY'S FAITH

By Johannys Jiménez-Hartog

This remarkable and inspiring true story is about a happy man—successful, hardworking, healthy, with his own business and a close and loving family. A great life! His name is Mario.

Mario and his wife were loved and respected where they lived. They were active in their community, and their two teenage children were excellent students, athletic, talented, and popular.

One day, Mario woke up in the morning not feeling well; he was tired, exhausted. He went to the doctor who told him, "Don't worry; must be a cold or some kind of virus." Within days, however, Mario was hospitalized, completely paralyzed.

In bed, unable to move a muscle, he still could feel and understand everything that was happening around him. He was finally diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome, an illness whose cause is unknown.

The immune system perceives the nervous system as a threat and paralyzes the connection between the muscles and the nerves. This condition has several levels, including death.

Mario had the worst kind. Within a week he went from an energetic, fun-loving, caring, contributing member of his community to a person unable to voluntarily move anything except his eyelids and eyeballs.

They repeated their belief in Mario's hopelessness and only stopped insisting on pulling the plug when confronted by the family's faith in Mario's recovery.

The doctors placed a tube in his throat so he could breathe. Later he was put on a ventilator. Given his poor condition, doctors advised his wife to disconnect everything and let him die. She vehemently refused.

Mario was aware. Unable to move or speak, he heard the doctors recommend pulling him off the ventilator and letting him die. They repeated their belief in Mario's hopelessness and only stopped insisting on pulling the plug when confronted by the family's faith in Mario's recovery. The doctors didn't know of Mario's deep faith in God and in himself.

During his hospitalization, Mario's wife, children, father, brothers, sisters, friends, and the entire community set about providing Mario and his family with whatever was needed. They prayed repeatedly for Mario's recovery. They prayed and took action, guided by divine wisdom.

Eventually, slowly, he recovered enough that he could be cared for at home with round-the-clock care. He had been in the hospital for a year when he was discharged, still needing intensive rehabilitation.

After many years, with perseverance, love, dedication, and faith, Mario was able to talk, feed himself, and use a wheelchair to get around. With the help of a walker, he could take some steps and manage the routines of daily life. Mario and his family dealt with his illness with confidence and a deep faith that he would recover gradually, bit by bit, step-by-step.

Mario's inspiring story of tenacity, perseverance, support, and trust touches me deeply because Mario is my brother. My family is from the Dominican Republic, and I was raised in Puerto Rico. My mother and father birthed 15 children. I have seven brothers. Mario is the second oldest.

As a minister, I have always taught that we need to have a clear vision of what we are called to do in our lives and challenge ourselves to do it.

Mario once told me from his hospital bed, "My goal is to get up from here and return to work." That was his vision, and he continues to work on achieving it.

Humanly, he has been overcoming obstacles. The wisdom of God in him always knew what he had to do. His spirit knew the possibilities.

Life presents difficulties. We don't cower from them. In any situation, we can look from our highest selves beyond our fears and doubts and see possibilities. We can look beyond how things may appear and see the power of God manifesting.

Mario and my entire family had the audacity to believe in God, to see life where others saw desperation, decay, and even death. United, together, we decided to live in faith, demonstrating the principles on which Unity teachings are based.

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."
—Philippians 4:13

Rev. Johannys Jiménez-Hartog is senior minister at Unity Para Todos, an online-only Spanish-language ministry (unityparatodos.org).

STAYING PRESENT UNTIL THE END

By Bill Englehart

My father had been suffering from Parkinson's disease for many years. While the decline had been gradual for a decade, in the last few years, it became more abrupt. Combined with the effect on his physical abilities was a lessening of his mental faculties. The time came when my mother needed more help, so my parents moved in with my sister and brother-in-law. Home health aides were a godsend. Then eventually he required care around the clock in a care facility.

Each visit I witnessed my father's decline. Seeing him use a walker was a jolt to my senses. He needed help showering and going to the bathroom. During one family gathering my sister made him a chart so he could identify each family member with pictures and names. There was less and less of the man I once knew.

I was grieving the loss of the father I had known. His memory seemed like a blackboard where all his experiences and memories were slowly being erased. I was heartbroken about the physical decline but even more so by the mental deterioration.

My mother could see in my eyes how shocked I was. She pulled me aside and said we should not spend our time mourning what had been lost but to celebrate what still remained. His worsening condition was inevitable. We would look back on this time and wish we could reclaim it.

This proposed change in perspective made a world of difference to me in relating to my father. Instead of feeling remorse that he had to use a walker, I celebrated that he could still be mobile. Instead of being depressed that his enjoyment in life was reduced to watching *Judge Judy* and *Let's Make a Deal* on TV, I enthusiastically watched with him. I



knew someone who'd won a car on *Let's Make a Deal*, and he was very impressed and happy to hear about that! Of course, with his memory fading, I had to tell him many times.

In what was to be our last conversation, he said he might not be there when I returned in a few months. I told him there was no guarantee for either of us. We got a chuckle out of that. Sitting together in the care facility, he would ask me the time about every five minutes. Previously that would have driven me batty. But I said to myself, *At least he still knows who I am*. He would fall asleep in the wheelchair and I would just wait for him to awaken. When he did, he was so happy to see me. That brought us both much joy.

In what was to be our last conversation, he said he might not be there when I returned in a few months. I told him there was no guarantee for either of us. We got a chuckle out of that. But I asked him, "If this were our last visit, what did he want to tell me?" We had a good exchange that stays with me to this day.

COVID lockdown at the facility prevented further visits until he went into hospice, and by then he was unable to communicate. I was grateful we had said our goodbyes months prior.

I believe on a spiritual level our loved ones know when we are present. When he took his last breath, I was alone with him. I looked up at the digital clock on the wall next to his bed. He had always wanted to know what time it was, and maybe he wanted me to note the time of his passing. I say that because when I looked at the hour and minutes displayed on the digital clock, they corresponded exactly to the month and day of my birth. He was there for my first breath, and I was there for his last.

Farewell, my father, until we meet again.

Rev. Bill Englehart is a writer, speaker, and teacher in Tucson, Arizona.

HOW NOT TO WORRY

By Peggy Konkel

As I write this, I have just completed reading the medical report about my mammogram. My mother died of metastatic breast cancer at the age of 47. I was 19 at the time.

I have gone for annual exams most years. I long ago decided that in terms of my life and spiritual unfoldment, breast cancer was part of my mother's journey but would not be mine. Still, I always feel a little anxious come testing time until the outer results confirm my inner knowing.

Now in my 70s, this is the first report ever to indicate that I need further testing because "asymmetries" were seen in both breasts. It is difficult to stay focused on the truth that all is well. Even if further testing reveals the need to address a physical problem, I know all is well.

I can decide to think positively rather than negatively when facing the unknown. I can put my trust in faith rather than fear. I can believe God is guiding me in every step, in every way.

How does one not worry when a dire possibility opens up in one's thinking? Here are some of my practices.

First, it is always good to center in God and know that this is the only moment that counts. This is the moment of decision. I can decide to think positively rather than negatively when facing the unknown. I can put my trust in faith rather than fear. I can believe God is guiding me in every step, in every way. That no matter what I must face, I will be led in right thought and action to successful outcomes.

As I release my fear to God, I rest in the presence of living in this day. I consider what I can do today that will make me feel healthy, to appreciate my body. I can share my concerns with someone who understands and cares for me. I can ask them to pray for me. So often, I am ready to pray for someone else, yet I hesitate and hold back when I need prayer support. I can focus on supporting someone else in need.

When I remember my mother's journey, I can feel blessed by how her walk uplifted and supported so many other women who followed her with a similar diagnosis. She was one of the original recipients of chemotherapy.

I can also look to my mother in gratitude for the lessons she shared with me in accepting my womanhood and moving forward in a man's world.

And finally, I can appreciate her for sharing her spiritual journey through her dying process and the legacy she left me.

Waiting for the results of a medical test can be a spiritual exercise in how not to worry, an opportunity for faith and gratitude.

Update: A second mammogram showed I am clear.

Rev. Peggy Konkel is a minister and speaker in Northville, Michigan.

MENTAL ILLNESS IN THE FAMILY

By John Beerman

Family relations are difficult even when you are trying your best to apply spiritual principles. Family members reflect you in their thoughts, mannerisms, and even their speech. It can be daunting to see yourself embodied in a family member, especially if he or she is struggling with mental illness.

I made little progress in my relationship until I accepted that I, too, had some of the characteristics of mental illness. I was sick too.

When one person in a family is ill, the entire family is deeply affected, each in a different way. And because family members can be alike in many ways, it is difficult to own your individual responsibility in another's illness. Enmeshment can happen, too, and then there is a struggle to separate from one another psychologically.

Seeing the mental handicaps in my daughter led me to recognize them in myself. What was I to do with such a realization?

I began to see her as whole and healthy, and to see our relationship as a growing, organic experience of father and daughter, living, loving, and enduring even while battling our demons.

I began to pray for her well-being and for our relationship. I began to treat her differently, as a whole and healthy individual.

It was not easy, and the problems persisted, but eventually a shift came. I cannot say when or even how, but Spirit guided me and showed me the way.

Is there hope for families affected by mental illness? Yes. However, it requires a steadfast commitment to practicing spiritual truths.

The second principle as taught by Unity is that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of Spirit and therefore are inherently good. Good means that deep within us, the God-spark lives and has its being, and yet it can be obscured by mental disease. This can be overcome, but it takes a strong commitment to becoming healthy.

Living in the present moment, seeing yourself and others as whole, and constant prayer are the tools that will light your journey.

If you or someone in your family suffers from mental illness, there is hope. Begin today by asking Spirit for guidance and then talk to someone you trust who has experience with treating mental illness. God will show you the way, but it is up to you to do the footwork and to hold the idea of wholeness for yourself or a loved one.

I know of no greater challenge on the spiritual path than having a family member afflicted by mental illness. Living in the present moment, seeing yourself and others as whole, and constant prayer are the tools that will light your journey. Be willing to do what your heart prompts you to do. You will be divinely guided as you rest in the awareness of spiritual consciousness.

Rev. John Beerman is the minister at Unity Community Church of Dunedin, Florida.

STILL OUR STRONG DAD

By Jeanmarie Eck

Growing up, my older sister and I looked to our father for strength and reassurance. He took great pride in maintaining our family home, a place where we were always welcome to stay when we needed a place to live or to visit whenever we could. My father's house was the central hub of our family.

As my father grew older, we expected he would slow down from working two or three jobs at a time to provide for his family. Never did we think the tables would turn the way they did.

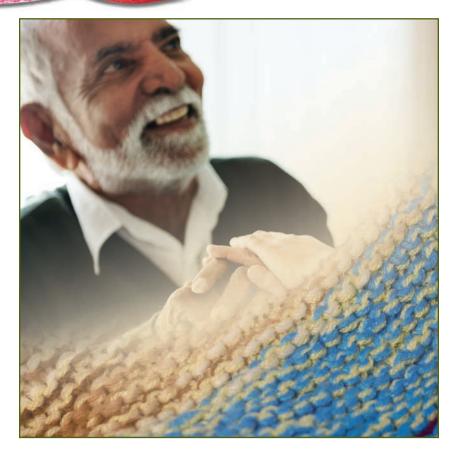
About 15 years ago, my sister SallyAnn noticed my father was not acting like himself anymore. I had noticed his becoming distant and difficult to connect with by phone, but I was newly married and was not seeing him as regularly as my sister. Her conversations with him became repetitive, like a broken record, and she could see his confusion.

She knew that without feeling God's presence in and through it all, she would not have made it this far.

Sadly, my father was diagnosed with moderate dementia. We discovered he might have had signs of dementia for 10 years prior to the diagnosis. Pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fit why my father's behavior had been changing over the years.

My sister selflessly took on the role of caregiver and prayed for strength as she processed the devastating news about how this condition could progress, realizing she would need to be there for him through it all.

The state of the s



While I was in seminary out of state, immersed in my studies to become a Unity minister, my prayers were with my sister and father as she moved through fear of the unknown, doing her best to keep him safe and active.

The neurologist put him on dementia medication to help slow the process. My sister spent nights researching this disease in order to prepare herself for his inevitable loss of cognitive function. That's when

she discovered that with proper diet, vitamins, and medication, his dementia could stabilize for many years.

It seemed like a miracle. Her faith was strong, and she said that deep down, she felt God knew a daughter's love and how much she had committed to doing all she could to care for our father. The neurologist said he was amazed that tests showed no signs of our father's dementia worsening.

SallyAnn continued to turn to God for strength, as she had once turned to our father. She knew that without feeling God's presence in and through it all, she would not have made it this far.

This year our father turned 92 years young and remains in good physical health, though the neurologist determined it was no longer safe for him to live alone. He moved in with my sister and her young son and has bravely faced the difficult adjustment that can occur when a person with dementia is relocated.

Still, there are times when he hears a Frank Sinatra song and sings all the words or tells a colorful story from his past, and SallyAnn sees signs of the dad we remember—the charming storyteller, full of life and humor. She sees him now as just as special as he was to her growing up but in a new way.

I am grateful for the blessing of our father, and for the gift of strength and faith that I have witnessed in the devoted love of my sister in accepting this sacred role of caregiver.

Rev. Jeanmarie Eck is associate minister at Unity of Houston, Texas.

A FAMILY HEALING FROM SUICIDE

By David Brian Adams

Nearly every family has one—that person who seems to breathe life and light into the room everywhere they go. That person whose love for life, family, and friendship inhabits every moment and is both intoxicating and infectious. That person who seems to calm every grievance, weather every storm, and light the path that brings the family back to the table, no matter what. My brother, Jim, was that person in our house.

When Jim committed suicide in 1989, I felt as if our family would never be whole again. Jim's light was gone. The soothing, steady heart that knew our secret hurts and brought us together despite our woundedness was no longer physically present, and we were adrift. Family gatherings once full of fond reminiscence now felt sad, silent, and hollow.

It was from this place of emptiness that we each reached for something more. Guided by our own inner wisdom, we embarked on our individual spiritual journeys toward healing.

For me, that journey began with forgiveness. I forgave myself, my parents, and siblings for the ways I thought we had failed to be there for Jim and each other. I forgave Jim for assumptions I had made about his not reaching out for help. I released the notion that God had somehow abandoned my family in this time of need.

Through this process of forgiveness and release, I realized God is incapable of leaving—the Comforter that Jesus promised dwells within (John 14:16). Trusting that Comforter, I fostered a relationship with the God that is truly in our midst. Through an ongoing practice of prayer,

meditation, and reflection, the inner light of Christ guided my actions. It revealed my role in restoring wholeness within our family.

It began with a letter. I wrote about the shame I felt growing up gay in a conservative household and my ongoing journey to overcome that shame. I wrote about everything I had withheld for years to avoid worry or rejection. Without judgment or blame, this letter fulfilled a desire to let my true inner light shine at last. As I stood at the mailbox with



copies in hand, I blessed each letter and asked that it be received in the spirit it was written. Prepared for whatever response I might get, I waited.

Within weeks, that letter was met with similar, openhearted letters. In time, these missives sparked opportunities for loving, vulnerable conversations. Continued conversations invited understanding, patience, and a renewed sense of connection.

Time spent reminiscing has become filled with laughter.

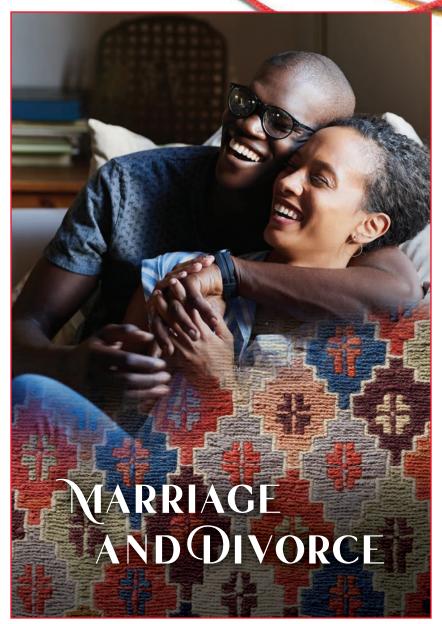
The love we have for each other brings us together again and again, and the light of that love shines brightly.

While this process was not always easy, it was worthwhile. Each of us learned to embrace our role as Spirit-led and truly began to recognize the healing light of Christ within at work. Our personal journeys, although varied in practice, began to bring us back together. Love ultimately led us back to the family table.

Today my family meets online every week. Gatherings that once seemed hollow are now plump with love. Time spent reminiscing has become filled with laughter. The love we have for each other brings us together again and again, and the light of that love shines brightly. My family is closer now than we have been in many years.

It is a closeness that honors the light my brother Jim was. It is a closeness that reflects the light he continues to be.

Rev. David Brian Adams is senior cominister at Unity of Independence, Missouri



MARRIAGE—STILL, I DO

By Kathy Beasley

I remember the excitement of our engagement as though it was yesterday. The glimmer of the ring took my breath away, such that I could hardly speak through tears of joy. The world felt electric to me.

Our story is a simple one of soul meets soul, introvert falls in love with an extrovert, the creative is intrigued by the intellectual, and the comedian finds solace in the entrepreneur's arms. Our spiritual practices have expanded to include integrity, laughter, listening, surprise, and friendship. We find harmony in the Silence, truth in a stolen glance, and joy in a kitchen dance party.

It has been a mere 956 days since our wedding in the presence of our family of choice. It was a memorable day, filled with laughter, tears, joy, and a lot of really good music. It was also the day when my life and the living thereof changed forever because everything about July 22, 2018, was an answer to prayer and an anchor for my hopes and dreams.



I recognize, as I sit here in the dim light of my office gathering my thoughts, that marriage is more than rites, rituals, customs, and ceremonies; a marriage is a living declaration of Truth, love, an act of faith between every breath.

Each day has been a lesson, a holy second chance, an opportunity to be free from the bond of precedent and released into the activity of Principle in our lives together. She and I each believe the power in our spoken words on that rainy Sunday afternoon became the foundation for every moment to come. What started as a vow has unfolded into a way of being that is lived out loud daily.

The words "I do" were not just a one-time nostalgic adventure. The words that we shared have become the infrastructure upon which all else in our life together rests, as each day is a chance to do all things in love and with love, over and over again.

The marriage ceremony has taught us how to live in the words that we spoke and to allow them to comfort us and remind us always of our Truth. Each day's journey has been a divine opportunity to heal, have, hold, and honor with all that we are, in the presence of pure love.

We live, move, and find our being in the activity of Principle in what we say. We celebrate daily the divine doing and undoing of what matters most in each moment. The words of our quiet prayers brought us together, celebrated our union, and weave together our lives.

The story for us is always to remember "I do" in the practice of living as we endeavor to be who we are, trust the power within us, and hold on to one another when the ground shifts beneath our feet. No matter what, still, "I do."

Rev. Kathy Beasley is minister at Central Florida Center for Spiritual Living in Orlando.

WORKING THROUGH DIVORCE

By Lesley Miller

I'll admit it. I'm jealous of divorced couples who get along with each other. You know the ones—they do holidays or important celebrations together with their kids, grandkids, and blended families. They don't snipe at one another. They are generally nice and well-behaved on family occasions, respectful even. Despite no longer being married to each other, they appear to hold the idea of "family" in enough regard to share meaningful moments without acting out.

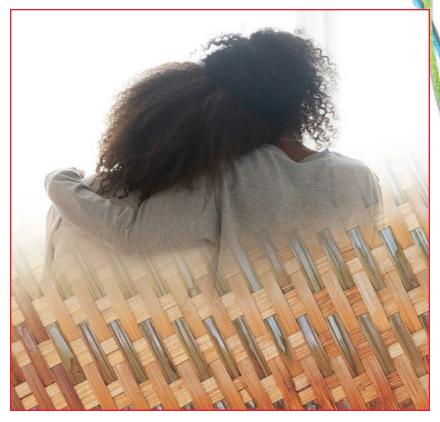
I want that. My heart yearns for a time when my former husband and I can celebrate family occasions with our children, and now theirs, without an anxious need to exclude the other or cause a cataclysmic, matter-meets-antimatter event that could destroy the cosmos.

In our family, there remains a terrible distress from our long-ago, adversarial divorce. The trauma of that experience, with its angry years before and contentious years after, has still not healed, not even in our adult children. We could have done better but didn't.

Does it matter how long a couple was together? In the beginning, there were great expectations, however misguided at the time, for a happy and loving life together. Precious and beautiful children came from that love. A new family began.

The British philosopher Alain de Botton observes that we are all likely to marry the wrong person. While the prospect is frightening, the error that our choice contains is a magnificent challenge, a gift of sorts, if we can individually find the courage and humility to learn greater trust and intimacy. If only we knew how.

When a marriage ends with children involved, counselors and courts advise parents to adapt amicably, working out living arrangements, finances, and parenting issues in cooperative ways. We did not.



There are no blueprints for divorce. Perhaps it is because divorcing does not have society's approval the way coupling does. There is no natural community of support through the difficulties and adjustments. How does a divorced parent find compassion from a society that still claims "till death do us part" as a family value?

Without the help of a wonderful therapist, I might not have survived the indifference outside and the shame within. Expectations at work and children at home insisted I carry on as if nothing had happened.

Divorce can be an opportunity to rebuild one's life and relationships, but it's hard to see the possibilities when bitterness, fear, and a sense of failure color your world, alongside the loss of hopes and dreams, social status, and financial security.

Navigating the divorce was like getting through a war. Twenty years later, a palpable mistrust still hangs over our family like a fog. My greatest regret is how our children were affected. Divorce happened to them too. When trust is shattered in a child, the pieces never go back the way they were.

I recently began praying for what I want—healing in my family. Prayer doesn't ask for things to be set right; it asks to see them rightly.

At first, I prayed for him to change. But what was my part? I remembered my old pattern of criticism and reactivity at a family birthday a few years ago. If trust had a chance to grow that day, I was the one who killed it. What still needs to heal in me?

One person cannot heal an entire family dynamic, but one person's healing can initiate change in that most precious of systems.

I feel Spirit pushing me toward harmony and a greater expression of love. My job is to let it guide me to heal my own hurt and unforgiveness. One person cannot heal an entire family dynamic, but one person's healing can initiate change in that most precious of systems.

Healing happens if we want it. While it hasn't happened yet, this is my prayer. And prayer changes everything.

Rev. Lesley Miller is a writer and teacher in New Jersey.

OVERCOMING INFIDELITY

By Veronica Walker-Douglas

Traditional wedding vows include heartfelt verses spoken by those who officiate and by the happy couples. These vows may be proclaimed in various languages and different religious traditions because the meaning and message of eternal love is universal.

"Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."—Mark 10:9

"Let marriage be held in honor by all."—Hebrews 13:4

So what happens when the vow breaks and the bond is broken?

Infidelity can be the ultimate challenge for a marriage and perceived as a conscious or subconscious wake-up call for the spouses. It can be viewed as a diversion from the core issues that have been avoided and create barriers in the marriage.

Adultery is mentioned 52 times in the Bible as one of the most frequently and severely condemned sins. The Bible indicates adultery is grounds for divorce, but reconciliation and saving a marriage is never beyond God's grace and guidance.

The path to moving past infidelity can be guided by a walk in faithfulness. One must be willing to return to love instead of departing in fear. Human will and ego needs are surrendered to the will of God, and the marriage is committed into the hands of the Father. The divine transformational plan can be revealed with husband and wife opening their minds to be enlightened by a greater understanding of their individual and spousal journeys.

At the core of this process is an invitation to practice forgiveness.

Forgiveness is releasing fear-based thoughts, actions, and reactions. Once fear is faced, an open space is created for love to replace it.

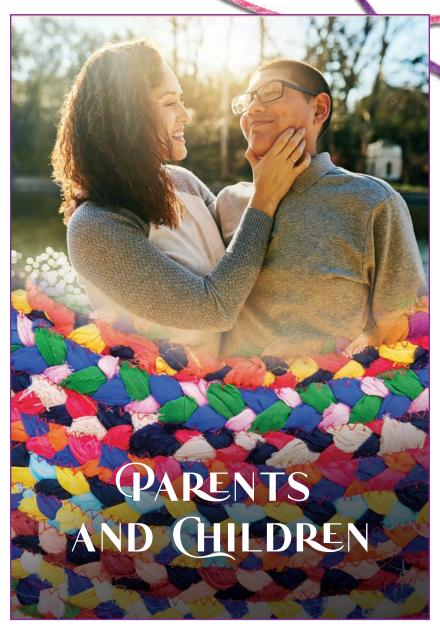
Forgiveness is the conscious act of allowing a miracle transformation to carry one to the new level of experience.

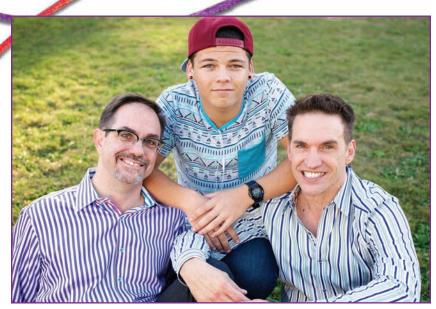
Self-forgiveness and acceptance are the foundation for moving forward and leaving a place of pain and regret. Then the weight is lifted; there is lightness and an increased desire to extend an outstretched hand to your partner.

This is compassion and pure, unconditional love that transcend time in a powerful way. Spouses are freed to be guided by the lesson and blessing of the experience. Defenses diminish, anger adjourns, and resentment relinquishes toward those involved. The affair can be an opportunity to rebuild on more solid, holy ground. The divine decision goes beyond leaving or staying; it is to place trust in God.

May couples stand together in steadfastness with a renewed commitment of true faithfulness.

Veronica Walker-Douglas is a clinical social worker in Illinois and affiliated with Christ Universal Temple in Chicago.





Tobias, center, with JD Schramm and Ken Daigle

ADOPTING TOBIAS

By Ken Daigle

The social worker walked in with a binder full of profile pages, summaries of hundreds of children's lives. I sat there for what seemed like hours, looking through profile after profile, unable to make a decision. How do you choose one child over another? How do you decide which is right from a photo? How do you look at a child with special needs and say, "No, you are too much; I can't handle you," just as other adults have already done to them?

My husband and I had decided that with all the children in the foster system, we should start our family by adopting one. So there I sat in the social services agency's conference room, the place where we had gone through weekends of training, looking at the profiles of children available to be placed with a foster family and possibly create our forever family.

The social worker walked in and saw the pain and confusion on my face. She said, "You don't have to worry; there are other parents for the other kids. Choose the one who is right for you." And with that permission—wisdom gleaned from her years witnessing people

struggle—I was able to make a choice.

There was one picture I kept coming back to, one photo that would not let me go. We thought we would adopt a 7- or 8-year-old who would be the big brother or sister to the infant we would adopt later. Instead, the child calling to me was a 15-year-old boy standing on top of a rock, flexing his muscles and looking as if he didn't have a care in the world. Which I knew was the furthest thing from the truth. So I turned to the social worker and said, "Tell me about him"



First glimpse of Tobias

Before his social workers would allow us to meet Tobias, they wanted something from us. We went to another social services agency and another conference room to meet with his current social worker, a former social worker, a special long-term social services worker, and Lisa, his court-appointed special advocate (CASA). Lisa had been with Toby since he was 8 years old and abandoned by his father. She knew Toby better than anyone.

They placed a binder of documents in front of us, at least three inches thick, and told us, "These are all the records of Toby's time in the foster care system."

He had had 22 different placements in eight years, not a single one lasting more than six months. In one case, he was to be adopted by a family with two other biological children when the father was severely injured in an accident, causing the family to send Toby back to the foster system.

In this mound of documents, there was one compelling statement from one of his social workers: "Despite all that heartache and pain that Toby has been through, he still dreams of being adopted by a forever family."

That day, they told us everything they knew about Toby and his life. Then they told us they would not introduce him to us or even tell him about us unless we were sure we could handle this. They asked us to pledge that we would not give up on him, no matter what. They feared another rejection would crush him.



The family today: (L-R) Ken Daigle, JD Schramm, Roma, and Tobias holding baby Joshua

They asked us to go home and think about it and let them know our decision the next week.

We did think and talk but it didn't take long. At first, I wondered how anyone could commit to a child no matter what, then I realized that is what every parent does. So that was an easy *yes*.

The larger truth was that Toby was in my heart already.
I was all in when I heard,
"He still dreams of a forever family."

The larger truth was that Toby was in my heart already. I was all in when I heard, "He still dreams of a forever family." What an example of the power of faith and hope! He knew his good was out there in the world, and he dreamt about it.

Two weeks later, we sat across from Toby in a Panera Bread restaurant, already committed to the young man we were meeting for the first time. We asked him what color he wanted his room painted.

His preference was black. We compromised on gray. Later we learned that no one in his life had ever asked him that question before.

Much later, at Toby's 18th birthday party, Lisa, the CASA worker, turned to us and asked, "How did you two do it? Every other foster family sent him back; how did you two do this?" I replied, "Neither of us gave up on him—at the same time."

There indeed were days when I was ready to give up. Days when Toby seemed determined to push us away. What teenager doesn't? There certainly were days when I had had enough, and the reality of what I was living with was so different than I had imagined. In those moments, I could not understand how we would get through it. Then I would remember the pledge we made to his foster care team: no matter what.

I would remind myself that if I had lived through what he had, if I had been abandoned by my parents, left in the foster system for years, rejected by family after family, never had anything that would always be mine, I would probably make the same choices. This understanding made it easier to see that he wasn't doing anything to me. He was simply doing it, and I was making it about me. I was the egocentric one, not the teenager! Then I could shift my thoughts and be more loving, patient, and kind—the very type of parent I always wanted to be.

Toby has been my greatest teacher. I have found myself feeling hurt, angry, disappointed, and ambivalent during the past six years. And I have learned what it means to love unconditionally and to accept love without conditions. Priceless.

Rev. Ken Daigle is senior minister at Unity San Francisco, California, and chairs the Board of Directors at Unity World Headquarters.

WHEN THEY LEAVE THE NEST

By Lulu Logan

Parents of babies, toddlers, school-age children, and teens know each age presents challenges, and each child is a puzzle unto themselves. But the goal is the same—to love them and take care of them to our utmost ability.

When my children were born, I desperately wished for a full night's sleep, believing that once the baby slept through the night, I would be set free. If only I had known that teething, illnesses, sleepovers, and broken curfews would also disrupt my sleep. A good night's sleep was years away.

Still, I believed my deep concern for them would evaporate as they grew into adulthood. Instead, my lack of control in their adult lives has sometimes contributed to even deeper frustration.

Though I carried them within the nourishing warmth of my body and will always consider them "mine," I have been surprised that this close and incomparable bond of love is not shared by them toward me.

Just as divine wisdom inherently allows me to do the seeking, the knocking, and the answering, so my growing wisdom can allow the same for my children.

Yes, of course, the four of them love me and treat me with respect, but that mother/child bond is not reciprocated. They don't feel the same possessiveness toward me that I have toward them.

When my heart aches for their closeness, or when their life paths, choices, and journeys do not include me, I wonder whether my higher self, my interior Mother/Father God, suffers similarly when I desert that

relationship. If the very hairs on my head are counted and divine DNA courses through the marrow of my bones, yet I seek less than the best for myself, I thwart the unfathomable love of God.

Remembering this truth, I find myself better able to take my hands off the very things that are none of my business, to keep my lips sealed, and to allow our relationship to grow as each child desires. Just as divine wisdom inherently allows me to do the seeking, the knocking, *and* the answering, so my growing wisdom can allow the same for my children.

Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

I had these same thoughts when each of my children were conceived, yet my power was limited. However, God's power within me, and within them, is unlimited. So I surrender them—surrender them to their own devices, choices, life paths, and journeys.

As long as I draw breath, I will be present for my children, who are now all grown up, just as I know God is always present for me.

Rev. Lulu Logan is a regular speaker at Unity of Merritt Island, Florida, and is starting an online community called Sojourners of Unity.

FORGIVING THE BIG LIE

By Elizabeth Longo

I grew up in a family with secrets. Keeping up appearances was an unspoken agreement. When I was in my 30s, I uncovered one of the secrets that had been so well-guarded—that my father was not my biological father. There had been many red flags, things that didn't make sense regarding my childhood, and many other lies to cover the big lie. My soul knew something wasn't right.

At first, I was angry and resentful, and I closed my heart to the people I loved most. It was painful and I felt isolated. Deep within me, I knew that if I wanted peace and happiness, I had to forgive. Jesus' words on the cross became crucial to my process. "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

It was painful and I felt isolated. Deep within me, I knew that if I wanted peace and happiness, I had to forgive. Jesus' words on the cross became crucial to my process.

I determined that holding on to unforgiving thoughts was too high a price to pay, and I realized I was a victim of my own story. So I committed to healing and forgiveness work.

First was prayer. I prayed unceasingly. I worked with denials and affirmations. I journaled, cried, and gave myself much-needed self-love.

Forgiveness, I have come to understand deeply, is a layered, ongoing process that begins with our desire to free ourselves from the belief that someone or something has done us wrong. Then the real work begins.

Compassion and understanding are key ingredients. Everyone is doing what they believe is best. I know my mother thought marrying

someone else was the best solution. A single mother during the 1950s would not have been well-accepted by society.

Then there are the emotional wounds that need tender care. I had to feel intense emotions and embrace unowned parts of myself. Journaling is a tool that helps me in letting go.

The mantra I kept repeating in my forgiveness journey was, "I let go and I let God." Along the way, I learned about loving myself unconditionally and the need to be gentle and kind to my soul.

Forgiveness liberates our souls from the heaviness of misperceptions and the pain of believing that whatever occurred should have been different. As long as we hold on to resentments and judgments, we are prisoners of our own making. Yet we alone hold the key to freedom. We must be willing to engage in a process of forgiveness if we want to be free of the past.

When I look back at the times in my life when I felt betrayed and had to forgive, I can clearly see the blessings. I am now more resilient. My faith in God is unshakable. I am aware that at the center of my being I have infinite resources. With God all things are possible.

Rev. Elizabeth Longo is a coach and ministry consultant in South Florida.

HOW TO LISTEN TO CHILDREN

By Carolyn Warnemuende

The spiritual practice of listening from the heart is one of the most powerful relationship-building tools we have. When we feel heard and understood, we know we are accepted for who we are in that moment.

Jesus our way-shower spoke about those who have "ears to hear." He was talking about people who listen with an open heart and mind so that they receive understanding. Giving the gift of understanding to another enhances the relationship and helps the other thrive.

When asked what they most want in a relationship, many say they want to be heard, to be understood. That is what our children want too. When we learn to listen for understanding, we have "ears to hear" the message behind the words that are spoken. Parents who have developed the skill of listening effectively to their children find that greater harmony reigns in their family.

Our greatest desire must be to deeply know our children and to understand where they are coming from.

Effective listening requires intention and attention. Our greatest desire must be to deeply know our children and to understand where they are coming from. We must be willing to take time to listen with full concentration. Effective listening comes from the heart as well as the mind.

As parents know, children will use most any method to get attention when they want to be heard. This can even include yelling or throwing a tantrum. Their reasoning goes, "If I can't get Mom or Dad to listen to me when I talk in a regular voice, maybe this will work." Usually this is not a conscious choice but a cry to be listened to.

To develop strong, positive relationships and avoid unnecessary conflicts, the following ideas work well:

Stop. Look. Listen. When your child wants to tell you something, take a moment to stop what you are engaged in, make eye contact, and listen wholeheartedly. When you give your full attention to the interaction, your behavior says, "What you have to say is important to me."

Reflect. After your child shares feelings or concerns, repeat in your own words what you have understood. Often the message is couched beneath the words used. For example, if she says, "I don't ever want to



go back to that stupid school again," you might say, "It sounds like you had a hard day at school. Do you want to tell me about that?" If she says, "No," accept that and don't push. More than likely though, she will elaborate on what happened because she knows that you heard her and care. Reflecting joyful feelings also opens the door to further conversation. Other times you may want to judge the message you've heard. Judging closes the door. When she feels judged, it will be hard for her to trust that you will listen to her in the future.

Acknowledge. After you and your child have had a successful conversation, acknowledge the experience. Saying, "Thank you for talking to me, I liked listening to you," can be enough. It's important for each of you to recognize how significant being heard is, and it encourages future interactions.

Listening to children with "ears to hear" is a spiritual practice that takes practice. As the skill is incorporated, you will begin to feel a different sense of connection with each other. As a bonus, your new way of listening will broaden to include everyone in your life. Listening deeply is a spiritual gift that enriches your life and the lives of all those with whom you come into contact.

Rev. Carolyn Warnemuende is minister at Unity Church in Redding, California.

FIVE FACETS OF MINDFUL PARENTING

By Paul John Roach

The first and most important thing we need to realize as mindful parents is the truth that we do not possess our children. We are stewards during their formative years but never owners.

As Kahlil Gibran wrote so beautifully in his thoughts "On Children" from his famous book, *The Prophet* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1923):

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

Of course, we love our children dearly and it is easy to become attached to them. Skillful and successful parenting, however, rests on the knowledge that, as stewards of these precious gifts, we love them most fully when we appreciate their inherent wholeness and integrity.

Having two daughters and four grandchildren, I know that each child is unique with their own personalities, interests, and abilities. Mindful parenting is acknowledging their uniqueness, then helping and teaching them not by dictating but by example. When we model behavior and values, children naturally respond.

I also know there is no one right way to parent a child. Various approaches work. Some parents establish a routine with specific mealtimes and bedtimes, for example. In general, I was that kind of parent with my oldest daughter. However, her own parenting style is



much more relaxed. She and her husband both work in the medical field with unusual routines, so family life is flexible.

Either approach works as long as the commonality is love and respect for the child.

Mindful parenting is not about everyone doing the same thing, following some perfect parenting guidelines. It is, as its name suggests, about being aware or mindful, allowing intuition to guide us. Mindfulness creates space in consciousness so that we do not react

to behaviors and stimuli but see them as part of the larger whole. Goodness knows there are times when children test our patience and push our buttons, especially when our lives are busy and we feel overwhelmed.

To help deepen our mindfulness and enjoy the gift of our children and the honor of being their parents, I offer five things I believe are important in successful parenting.

One. The first is the courage to create healthy boundaries. In our desire to please and encourage our children, we are sometimes loath to use the word *no*. We feel it is negative and limiting. However, healthy boundaries can form an expansive container that provides both freedom and order. Children appreciate that boundaries offer safety and a consistent pattern to their lives. My oldest daughter told me that she likes to say *yes* as much as she can while still leaving room for an occasional *no*. She believes her children are respectful of that.

Goodness knows there are times when children test our patience and push our buttons, especially when our lives are busy and we feel overwhelmed.

Two. Another mindful approach is our willingness to learn from our children. Parenting is a two-way street and our children are full of all kinds of wisdom. As Jesus said, they are close to the kingdom of God in their guilelessness, honesty, and innocence. Learning from children helps us avoid the trap of thinking that adults always know best. It can be a joyously reciprocal relationship.

Three. Variety is important too. Time on the computer screen can be rewarding, but it is good to balance that with play in the yard or walks and adventures in nature. Involving the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of being helps create well-rounded children.

Four. A fourth approach is to remember to have fun. Play, laughter, and exploration help bond families and create lifelong memories.

Five. Finally, an important part of mindful parenting is to take time for yourself. We do ourselves and our children a disservice if we don't take time in this way. Overwhelm and even resentment can sabotage our efforts to be the best parents we can be. Quiet time, a regular date night, the pursuit of an interest or hobby are important ways to recharge and renew. Often grandparents, friends, and a support system can help.

May these suggestions for mindful parenting bless you and your family and help bring greater joy into your lives.

Rev. Paul John Roach is a minister and writer in Fort Worth, Texas, and host of the World Spirituality podcast on unityonlineradio.org.

FINAL WORD: FAMILY IS AN INSIDE JOB

By Trish Yancey

It's only natural to want to turn to our families in times of challenge or celebration. We often have incredibly high (and possibly unrealistic) expectations about how our tribe is supposed to function.

Ideally, a family—that is, our families by birth or by choice—would seamlessly come together to provide a blanket of love, protection, joy, and support. But people aren't caricatures. They are real, complex, and flawed. With every member perfectly imperfect, every family unit offers the equivalent of a doctoral program in spiritual growth and evolution—if only we will risk receiving it.

Each family member has their own personality, capabilities, and emotional wounding that makes their contribution to the whole singularly unique. Their quirks and characteristics will sometimes fit perfectly with our needs, while at other times they leave us feeling misunderstood or unsupported. We are tribal creatures who thrive on connection, even as we are challenged to grow and evolve through it.

Maybe one family member is precisely who we want by our side in a crisis yet can be emotionally unavailable. Another hurts our feelings at times but is the first person we turn to for advice. Still another knows exactly what to say to bring us back to center but seems incapable of understanding our overall life choices. They share our laughter, our tears, our hopes, and our fears. We love them dearly, and they can also drive us crazy.

So where does this leave us? My heartfelt prayer in sharing this is that it might leave you where it has left me, with one of the most valuable life lessons I have ever learned: Begin within.



Before reaching out to family, pause and center yourself first. We might have relatives who answer our distress calls before we even realize we have dialed the phone, but those are exceptions, not the rule. Beyond that, inclusion and connection should be made with forethought and on purpose.

It also takes presence of mind and heart. If I'm not centered in the awareness of divine oneness, I can easily see others as being against me or fault them simply for being who they are.

So before expecting anything of anyone else, require something of yourself. Empathy. Understanding. Compassion. Tolerance. Of incredible value is the ability to recognize and appreciate that everyone is in a different place emotionally and that few will be able to meet us where we are. Going to an auto mechanic to have our teeth fixed is sure to leave us disappointed at best, injured at worst. Let's use that logic when interacting with our loved ones. No one person will ever meet all our needs, nor should they.

When we begin within and maintain our connection to Source, perspective shifts. We can appreciate everyone for exactly who they are, without needing to ask them for things they can't give or expecting them to be someone they aren't. We can embrace them in our heart and receive the lessons they are there to share.

With our needs divinely met, our network naturally grows and expands to embrace the entire human family, each member contributing to humanity's spiritual unfoldment.

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