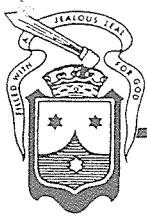


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Life is Worth Giving

SEVEN HABITS TO AVOID FOR A HAPPY LIFE

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

The care and nurturing of the self is a very important factor in the faith-filled and emotional life of each person in fostering a good and loving relationship with God. Our Faith is very much based on each person's true acceptance of self as God's greatest human creation. In this column are some suggestions of how to enhance our life, and to add to its joy here on earth. The suggestions may seem somewhat negative but in reality are quite positive.

1) Avoid jumping to conclusions before truly understanding a situation or listening to what a person is actually saying. Jumping to conclusions is one of the most dangerous mental exercises in life because we often tend to overlook vital factors in a situation. Patiently listen ^(to) ~~to~~ what the other person is saying or trying to say. Then we will be more able to help the other person. God gave us two ears and only one mouth, so He may be indicating that we should listen twice as much as talking.

2) Avoid trying to be always perfect. The word in Latin means to "follow through" or "complete." A more operative word in Scripture would be "compassion" which enables us to empathize or "feel with" another person and his/her problems in living a good Christian life.

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People usually relate better to compassion and love, rather than being encouraged to be perfect.

3) Avoid coloring the world in black and white. God has colored our world in a wonderful variety of shades to add to its beauty. Likewise, if people insist that everything in life must be either black or white, with no changes or variations, then much of the wonderful color and beauty will be lost in our lives.

4) Avoid suppressing your feelings about self and others. Feelings are part of our emotional make-up and are a valid and true expression of who we really are. Sharing our feelings about ourselves and others enables us to know more truly and deeply how we really feel about people and situations. It also enables others to understand at times our feelings of being hurt, intentionally or not, by them. It also enables us to let them know our feelings of love and gratitude for ^(WHAT) they truly are in our lives. People need to know these things. Such knowledge adds great joy and wisdom to life.

5) Avoid difficult situations and people. There are usually certain situations in our lives that are truly negative or even threatening. Such situations may be the result of previous negative experiences or even traumas from our earlier lives. For example, a person may have a life-long aversion for swimming after almost drowning in youth.

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With this in mind, it is not generally good to force ourselves or others to re-experience such negative things in life. And almost the same may be said of people who seem to enjoy being negative or making life difficult for others. Avoiding them until they can change for the better is an important factor in our true enjoyment of life. Of course, we can always pray for such people, or help ~~them~~ them to get professional help.

6) Avoid refusing to share our experiences and feelings with others. Sharing who we truly are, and also what happens to us, is the sign of a good and healthy relationship between ourselves and others. When something good happens in our lives, for example, the birth of a new family member or the recovery from a serious illness, there is a good and natural tendency to want to share the experience with others. A joy shared is a joy doubled. We also need to share at times the negative things that happen to us so that others may share their compassion and concern that is part of any good relationship.

The same can be said of the feelings we have for family members, relatives, or friends. When we share our feelings for them, we truly validate our relationships in a truly Christian manner.

7) And finally, avoid taking things said and done too personally.

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A true measure of a good and healthy relationship is that we do not need to measure each word, think twice or thrice what we are going to say, or hesitate to express ourselves in the fear that we may be misunderstood by the other person, or treated in some negative way.

And in our own listening, it is important to accept what is said in a good and natural way. But if something is bothering us about what has been said, then a simple clarification can be graciously ~~requested~~ requested.

Most people don't usually set out ~~to~~ deliberately to hurt or offend us, especially if we have a healthy and sustaining relationship with them. Therefore, it is more important to seek a clarification or explanation, rather than spending the time in pouting on negative feelings by taking something too personally.

People, especially family and friends, are an important and spiritual dimension of our lives to bring joy to our days.

As the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote many years ago: "A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of Nature."