**Life Lessons on LOVE and CARING:**

**Concern, Love, Devotion, Loyalty, Helping**

**Who do you rely on, to give you these soul foods? Who can rely *on you,* to share yours with them?**

**Are the people you allow to help you living healthy lives, leaving the world a better place for all?**

**Do they care about what’s best for everybody in the long run, or just for people who care about them?**

**Are *those you help* healthy, and leaving the world a better place? If they are or not, it’s contagious.**

 The key to healthy caring is ***discernment*** – we need to see both the sick and the healthy sides of everyone’s nature, especially our own, and give preference to what’s healthy, to whatever works out best for all in the long run. The sickening sides of ourselves are concerned with image management, the parts of our nature we can fix ourselves. That part helps those who will mostly help us, such as dependent loved ones who won’t much help themselves or others. The key toxic belief is that *there is only so much love to go around, so we have to keep it close at hand, where we can reel it back in.* The healthy belief is that *the more we love expecting nothing in return, the more we find we have to give,* with new love coming from within, and from other healthy people.

 ***Toxic, Unhealthy Beliefs*** ***Healthy Beliefs for Wellbeing***

• When others get loved, that’s love I could have had. 🡪 • If I rejoice in that love they get, my love grows.

• When I celebrate what others lose, that’s free joy for me. 🡪 • Feeling up when you’re down will make me sick.

• I see many people who are dependent on me to rescue them. 🡪 • All can seek and find the help and healing they need.

• I admire people who take really good care of themselves. 🡪 • I admire balanced concern for God, others, and self.

• I love who I see you to be, more than I love the real you. 🡪 • I love the real you and me, not the folks you see us as.

• I don’t care much for people I don’t know or understand. 🡪 • I let myself take care of hurting, helpless strangers.

• I quickly get depleted helping people who are helpless. 🡪 • As my circle of concern grows, I heal and grow.

• On social media, I compare how others look to how I look. 🡪 • On social media, I see what others feel and need.

 ***Toxic, Unhealthy Habits*** ***Healthy Habits of Wellbeing***

• I may get mad or envious about the good fortunes of others. 🡪 • I rejoice when others rejoice, weep when they weep.

• I over-indulge and over-protect my loved ones. 🡪 • I lovingly respect others so I can let go joyfully.

• I help only needy people already helping themselves. 🡪 • I help needy people build and enjoy a better life.

• I care about others’ feelings and needs, and neglect my own. 🡪 • I take care of others, *and* of their caretaker (me).

• I help others who let me do it my way, and thank me. 🡪 • I help others when no one will know I’ve done it.

• I will scratch your back if you scratch mine. 🡪 • I enjoy helping those who can’t do anything for me.

• I have trouble accepting and returning genuine love. 🡪 • I receive unconditional love because I give it.

• I enjoy criticizing and correcting people on social media. 🡪 • I’m sociable with my media, and my posts are kind.

**RAISING CHILDREN WHO LOVE WELL**

 King Solomon said, “Guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” When a heart loves one person or group too much, a spring for loving self and others dries up inside. Young adults with this pattern have usually learned it from their parents. It doesn’t have to be this way.

 The key to a healthy wellspring of love is *balance*. • Love your neighbor as yourself, and love yourself as you love others. • Love the neighbor who is balanced that way, more than the one who isn’t. • Watch out for the ones who love themselves or someone else too much or too little, including you, as they will drain your wellspring. • Keep your wellspring connected to your Creator, and to the community that loved your heart first, as they know the well-balanced life the heart needs to stay healthy.

 How can parents raise children with well-balanced hearts? Make sure that you *show love in a balanced way to everyone in the home,* including yourself. Don’t show more love to the ones who show the least love to themselves and others. Instead, do *show some love to people most in need outside the home,* such as the elderly, sick, less privileged, and those new to the community. And at each stage in your children’s development, be ready to teach them to love in balanced ways they will need at that age.

*Preschool Years*

 Always indulging or picking up crying children will exhaust you both. Teach babies they may have to wait awhile for their desires to be met. Learning to tolerate a little discomfort is a way for them to gain strength. Their irrational fears will subside, if they’re given enough time to adjust, thus showing love themselves and for you. This works with fears like darkness, storms, quiet, the sight of new people, the taste of new foods, and being away from their parents. They can learn to distract and soothe themselves, thus developing a taste or tolerance for things they will be experiencing in life.

*Elementary School*

 Friendships in grade school pull children’s hearts from their families. When they’ve been rejected, while you comfort them, give them more education than sympathy. The two keys are teaching them to give *attention* and *affection* wisely. “Why give your attention to them, and hope they’re nice to you? Pay them no mind, and let those snooty people have each other. Look for people who need a friend, for people that are nice to everybody. Be nice to them and see how that goes.” Tell them how these things worked well for you and others when you were young.

*Middle and High School*

 Passions run higher now. Being rejected in love, left out of a clique, or worst of all, getting locked into a lopsided romance or clique are big hurts that most teens suffer. But not to worry *–* it’s better for them to learn from these experiences than to avoid them. They’ll learn when you ask (and keep asking) these questions: • “You are giving and forgiving a lot, not getting much back. Why?” • “Why do you deserve this?” • “Why not talk your feelings out with a healthy person, instead of acting them out with one who’s not?” • “Do you enjoy your life more or less than you did before you got into this?” • “How does this end?”

 It doesn’t help to lecture or criticize teens, or those they love. The best principles to teach are those in the first two paragraphs of this article, and the first article in this series (the July issue). Stories will help, especially from your own life. The best you can do is to guard your own heart. Show them how much you enjoy life, thanks be to your healthy, well-balanced wellspring heart.

**Balancing Love for Self and Others: Envy vs. Compassion**

**Envy/Jealousy rots the bones, says Prov. 14:30; Descriptions of Envy: James 3: 14, 16; 4: 1-3. For Jesus, the 10th Commandment (coveting, comparing) calls for love, compassion (Mt 19:19)**

**Descriptions of Compassion (*agape*, Love):**

 **Isaiah 58: 6-12** Prophetic call to specific acts, with specific blessings from God

 **I Cor 13: 4-7** Paul’s classic expression of “Love is patient and kind…”

 **I John 3: 16-17** God is love; we love because He first loved us

**I John 4: 16-21** Perfect love casts out fear

**Matt 25: 31-46** Caring for the sick, lonely, imprisoned, hungry is the way we show our

love for God, and our eligibility for the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Examples of Envy**

**Gen 4: 1-5** Cain envies Abel’s favor with God, and kills him

**Gen 37: 1-5, 9,11** Brothers envy father’s favor of Joseph, and try to kill him

**Luke 15: 25-32** Brother of prodigal son refuses to join the party

**Matt 11: 16-19** People won’t fast and cry with John, or eat and drink with Jesus

**Matt 27: 18** Envy is given as the motive for church leaders killing Jesus

**Examples of Compassion**

**Hosea 1-3** Hosea stands by his wife through adultery and harlotry, and buys her

 back. This symbolizes God’s love as well.

**Matt 8:3, 9:36, 14:14, 15:32, 20:34, and 23:37** Examples of the compassion of Christ

**Luke 10: 27-37** The good Samaritan illustrates the greatest commandment

**Example of Compassion overcoming Envy**

**I Sam 18: 1-4** In contrast to the envy of his father King Saul toward David for his

 **I Sam 19: 1-7** popularity, youth, and courageousness in battle, Jonathan loved David as

 much as his own life. He supported him even by facing his father’s

 murderous rage, and overcoming it.

**Commandments to Express Love/ Ways to Regenerate Love with Self-Discipline**

**Ex 20:17**  The 10th Commandment: don’t covet what your neighbor has.

**Lev 19: 17-18** Love one another, don’t hate; don’t carry any grudges.

**Matt 5: 43-47**  Love, bless, pray for, and do good to your enemies.

**Luke 7: 44-47** Woman at Jesus’ feet: the more we’re forgiven, the more we can love.

**Rom 12: 14-15** Bless and don’t curse your enemies. Laugh with those who laugh, and

 weep with those who weep.

**I Cor 13: 4-5**  Hang in there – don’t seek to get your own way.

**Col 3: 12-14**  Shows how Concern is related to Respect and Anger: forgive others as Christ forgave you.

**James 2: 14-16** What good is faith or love without caring for practical, physical needs?

**I John 3: 16-18** In response to Christ’s sacrifice, we should love others, not just in word,

 but in deed and truth.