

On the Corner – “Values and relatives at Christmas”

by Bob Docter

The term *relative* cannot be understood in isolation. It's always at least two of something. If we're talking about those people who come by your house every Christmas and who often have the same last name as yours, they are probably connected in some way to you either through blood or marriage. They are *related* to you. They are your *relatives*, and, I hope, you have a *relationship* with them.

Possibly, some of them fit the motion picture stereotype of the unpleasant, demanding, judgmental, critical, disapproving, fault-finding, unsympathetic person to whom you are “related” and who needs to be invited for the Christmas celebration at your house every year.

Good luck!

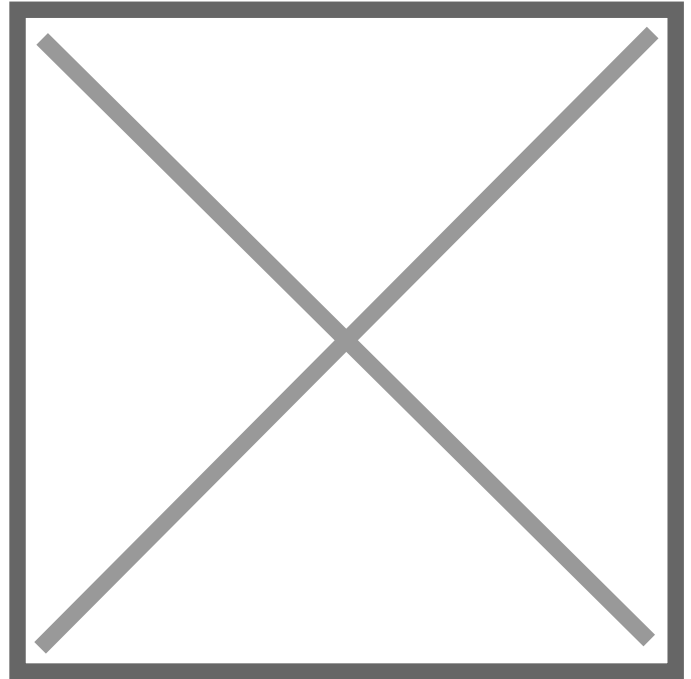
This person's characteristics indicate definite unhappiness, disappointment with self, surroundings and others. This person possibly is older, in pain and most likely lonely. I suspect this person doesn't like her/him self very much if at all, probably feels unwanted and isolated and needs some attention – from you.

If that predicament fits you and you've forgotten how to give hugs or be assertive, I suggest you work on your empathy, stay uninvolved emotionally with the judgmentalism and act as if you enjoyed the person. When all else fails, take time to recognize the relationship between your stress and your fight-or-flight mechanism. Avoid the “fight” choice and, instead, make the flight choice by “going to the bathroom” or taking a brisk walk when you feel an explosion coming on.

Now, my situation is a little different.

Personally, I'm looking forward to a wonderful Christmas because I am truly a VERY wealthy man.

Don't get me wrong. I don't have a lot of money. What I do have is family. My wealth comes after generations and years of investment – not in banks or securities – not in bonds or stocks. My investments have come as a heritage from my parents who lived and practiced a consistent set of



core values in such a way that they permeated the atmosphere around me and, along with my twin brother; we caught them and made them our own.

Now, we're living them, and the contagion moves on to a second and third generation.

The patterns of family life move inexorably in one form or another from a prior generation to a following generation and on and on and on. From this, it is incorrect to assume that life styles between generations are necessarily similar. Take my brother and me. We are both very much alike and, at the same time, very different. Our similarities tend to be in relation to our core values. Those values, however, become evident to the following generation in different ways as some life style choices vary. Our commitments to each other bind us tightly while our independence and individuality has led us to some different choices.

With me, on Christmas Eve our family assembles – all 25 or 30 of them, usually. Often, we have guests as well. In fact, we have invited the same relatives to our house every Christmas. I've never noticed how he arrives, but he always shows up. He's very comforting and helpful – really, kind of like a father to me. He always brings his son, Jesus, along with him because it's his son's party we're having. To remind every one why they are with us, I find my father's Bible (KJV) and read portions of Luke 2. It's happened every Christmas.

Maybe, this first act of the family's Christmas celebration puts us all into a friendly frame of mind. No one comes close to emulating the characteristics of the person described above. We can't help but think of the father and the son's sacrifice and love for us as we enjoy the expression of love for one another.

It all comes down to values – how one perceives the Christmas season and life in general. Our values determine the nature of our behavior. They dictate the focus of our self-talk, powerfully influence our interpersonal style, and govern the direction of our spirituality.

Recently, I sought to reacquaint myself with some of my core values. This is what I came up with:

Love – a primary emphasis in my life that I seek to communicate both explicitly and implicitly. From it I add a sub-set of four parallel values:

Loyalty

Trust and being **Trustworthy**

Compassion

Respect

Justice- perhaps society's most essential value. For me, this value includes:

Honor and **Honesty**

Orderliness

Freedom and **Responsibility**

Equality and **Diversity**

Peace

Commitment – gives us:
Perseverance
Consistency

Altruism
Empathy

Courage
Faith

As I look over this set of values, I recognize my own deficiencies. This knowledge motivates me. I see in them an interpersonal orientation, the kind of relationships needed within institutions of society, including the family, the church, the school, the courts, the government.

We pause in this season to celebrate the birth of one who daily lived a life that enshrined these values.

Merry Christmas