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John Defrain

University of Nebraska--Lincoln, jdefrain1@unl.edu

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NebFact



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Creating a Strong Family Spiritual Well-Being: Sacred Connections

John DeFrain, Extension Specialist, Family and Community Development

Several months ago, my wife Nikki, youngest daughter Erica, and I were having tea with Bryson, an older gentleman, in the dining room of his modest home in Maitland, New South Wales, Australia. We were in Australia to work on a project supported by the Commonwealth Government to study the strengths of Australian families.

Bryson's wife of many years, Joan, had died of cancer eight years before. "Do you still feel connected to Joan?" I asked. "Oh, yes," he replied. "She's right here in the room with us now."

I found myself smiling. I had heard this many times before from people in strong families. "She's with me a lot," Bryson continued. "She comforts me and looks over me, and makes it possible for me to go on in life in this world without her. I would have ended it all a couple years ago if Joan wouldn't have been with me."

Bryson has a profound and deep emotional connection with his late wife, a connection similar to the one our friend Louise has for her mother. Louise's mom died when she was 15 years old, but a powerful bond still lives in her heart today. "Sometimes when I'm feeling sad, and sometimes when I'm feeling happy, I'll go out to Wyuka Cemetery and talk with Mom," she said. "I tell her how life's going and tell her how much I miss her. I know it sounds crazy, and I don't tell many people about it, but it gives me great comfort."

Ordinary words don't do this bond justice, and in developing our model of family strengths, we decided to use the words spiritual well-being to describe this sacred connection. Years ago we talked about religion as a family strength, but our thinking evolved and the term spiritual well-being seems to work better.

This is one of a series of eight NebFacts, including two publications which introduce the series and provide a broader perspective.

- [What Is a Strong Family, Anyway?](#), NF00-439
- [Qualities of Strong Families](#), NF00-446
- [Appreciation and Affection: Developing an Emotional Bond](#), NF00-440
- [Commitment: The Family Comes First](#),

People tend to associate the term religion with institutions and doctrine. For many people, these associations are quite positive. For others, the term conjures up negative images, often going back to childhood. Besides, the term religion isn't really broad enough to describe what strong family members have been describing to us through twentysomething years of research.

Some families talk about faith in God, faith in life, faith in loved ones. They tell us that they are generally hopeful about life and believe that, in a broad sense, life works out pretty well for them. Some describe a feeling of oneness with the world, a connection to nature, to the land. Some people talk about how important it is to them that family members share important ethical values and beliefs and that they express themselves in these terms by commitment to important social causes.

And then there are the Brysons and Louises of the world who talk about their families in almost religious terms, describing the love they feel for one another as sacred and selfless. What profound force drives parents to dive into raging torrents to rescue a child in distress without the slightest consideration for their own personal safety?

Spiritual well-being comes from the caring center within each individual that promotes sharing, love and compassion. Spiritual well-being is the feeling or power that helps people transcend themselves, rising above the mundane and petty to identify with the greater good: "I feel my family is a part of all the families of the world," said one individual.

Membership in a religious or spiritual group can provide a caring, supportive community to help when illness strikes, a baby is born or an accident occurs. Friends in the group are often quick to help each other. But many strong families are not involved with such an institution. In Australia we found that a relatively small percentage of families went to a church, synagogue, mosque or temple on a regular basis, but many families still nurtured a sense of spiritual well-being in their lives.

My minister, Charles Stephen, once described religion as "the search for that which is sacred in life." Strong families find solace in these sacred connections.

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NF00-441

- [Positive Communication: Smoothing Out the Bumps in Family Life,](#) NF00-442
- [Enjoyable Time Together: A Journey of Happy Memories,](#) NF00-443
- [Spiritual Well-Being: Sacred Connections,](#) NF00-444
- [Successful Management of Stress and Crisis,](#) NF00-445