

MULTIGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION: THE POSITIVE OF SHARING YOUR FAMILY'S STORY

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Most of us have a vague knowledge of our family history beyond our grand-parents, and even then, we don't know much about them other than our interaction with them when we were children or young people and because of our age we were hardly interested in knowing our family's history. Yet something interesting is being discussed regarding the correlation between a person's stability and ability to cope with life. This has to do with how much a person feel he/she belongs to his/her particular family of origin. Researchers are discovering the power of transgenerational or multigenerational transmission. A *New York Times* article states that "...children who have the most self-confidence have ...a strong "intergenerational self." They know they belong to something bigger than themselves." This "something" is their family tree.

If this statement is true, then, every family ought to have a goal of knowing their family's history as best as possible. We've already known what medical doctors have told us regarding our health and inherited potentials for diseases like diabetes, heart disease, cancer, etc. The more we know who we are in the "plural" the better we are in knowing where we might be heading as individuals. Our friends The Latter Day Saints have done a very commendable job at knowing their ancestry. And, maybe this isn't so terrible for Christians to embrace after all. Sarah Lowe, one of their bloggers, said,

Because family teaches us the basic, fundamental beauty of humanity. There are three things getting to know one's family teaches us about ourselves. First, it helps us deal with our own challenges; we can pull ourselves so thin at times we forget what it is that holds us together. Tracing the life of an ancestor can teach us a lot about the strength of being human. Second, it teaches us sympathy. We all have a tendency to slowly get impatient, to get busier and to lose a bit of sympathy. When our heart goes out to those who came before us, our heart turns towards those we come in contact with each day.

Third it gives us joy. Laughter has been proven of value by common sense and scientists alike. There is humor inherent in life, there are funny names, hilarious occupations, and stories that make us laugh out loud. These can help to uplift us and give us a perspective on the joy we can find in our own life.

In the New York Times article, Bruce Feiler, shares what Psychologists have deduced:

Psychologists have found that every family has a unifying narrative, he explained, and those narratives take one of three shapes.

First, the ascending family narrative: "Son, when we came to this country, we had nothing. Our family worked. We opened a store. Your grandfather went to high school. Your father went to college. And now you. ..."

"Second is the descending narrative: "Sweetheart, we used to have it all. Then we lost everything."

"The most healthful narrative,"

Dr. Duke continued, "is the third one. It's called the oscillating family narrative: 'Dear, let me tell you, we've had ups and downs in our family. We built a family business. Your grandfather was a pillar of the community. Your mother was on the board of the hospital. But we also had setbacks. You had an uncle who was once arrested. We had a house burn down. Your father lost a job. But no matter what happened, we always stuck together as a family.'"

The point is that as children understand who they are beyond themselves and that in their trans-generational family lines that cover several generations of individuals with successes and failures, their ability to cope with their own setbacks and accomplishments is much better than when they have no knowledge of who they are in the overarching sense of their family history.

Now, if this is true, then a good way for a family to begin to raise well-balanced members of their families is to begin to share their story with their kin "warts and all."

Here are some suggestions that may help you get started:

1. Begin a family tree (genogram) that identifies all important members of your family including grandparents histories on both sides of the family.

2. Start a list of all the significant events in your family's history.
3. Celebrate the great accomplishment by any and all of your kin.
4. Grieve all the losses and tragedies found in your family's history.
5. Create a sense of belonging by knowing where you came from geographically.
6. Are there other cultures in your family's history that you should recognize? For example, are there different races mixed in your family of origin? Learn about each one and pass it down to your next generation.
7. The more you know about who you are through your extended family the more you and your children will be able to withstand the reality of life.

The article in the *New York Times* concludes:

The bottom line: if you want a happier family, create, refine and retell the story of your family's positive moments and your ability to bounce back from the difficult ones. That act alone may increase the odds that your family will thrive for many generations to come.

A beautiful Scripture in the Bible to remind you of the blessing of a family is Psalm 128.

Make this a desire of yours as you seek to know the beauty and treasure that comes from knowing who your family is. It may also change your destiny.

*Blessed are all who fear the Lord,
who walk in obedience to him.*

*You will eat the fruit of your labor;
blessings and prosperity will be yours.*

*Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.*

*Yes, this will be the blessing
for the man who fears the Lord.*

*May the Lord bless you from Zion;
may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life.*

*May you live to see your children's children—
peace be on Israel. (NIV)*

Resources:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/17/fashion/the-family-stories-that-bind-us-this-life.html? r=1>

<https://familysearch.org/node/1102>