

THE THREE IMPORTANT 'F's' IN MY LIFE – Faith, Family and Friends

In his early twenties, American author Henry David Thoreau, spent two years living in a little cabin which he had built for himself on the shores of Walden Pond, near Concord, Massachusetts. As well as maintaining his family and many friendships, he very much embraced silence and solitude and as he wrote in his journal in 1853, 'I wish to hear the silence of the night, for the silence is something positive and to be heard.' In another thought-provoking entry, he wrote that in any great space for conversation, 'there should be a certain degree of silence surrounding you.' He believed that silence was not an aesthetic experience – it was a singular mode of inhabiting one's own thoughts and conversing with the world. Oh, to have that luxury today in our own lives!

Eight years later, he published a book of essays describing his experiences of living in his little cabin. He entitled the book *Walden*. Being a man of great perception, it is full of beautiful insights on life and loving.

There is one particular passage of his book which touches me. Thoreau talks about the three chairs in his life which are important to him: 'I have three chairs in my little cabin,' he writes. 'One chair is for society, one chair is for friends and one chair is for solitude, for myself.' His words made a deep impression on me and as I pondered upon these words of wisdom, I reflected how true they are of our own lives as well. This of course, led me to ask myself what I believed are the three most important 'chairs' in my life.

Since the devastating Covid pandemic overwhelmed us and the older I get, the more I realize how significant the 'three chairs' meant to Henry Thoreau. His thoughts were deeply philosophical. My thoughts, although in many ways similar, follow a slightly different train of thought. Instead of 'chairs' I find myself thinking of the Three 'Fs' – Faith, Family and Friendships which are important to me.

The first 'F' is for my Faith: Reflecting over the long years of my life, I realize how much I had taken my faith for granted. When I was very young, I naively believed that the world would never end until everyone became a Catholic! I also believed something 'mega' would happen in my lifetime! Living in times of such uncertainty as we are today, I am sure I am not the only one whose thoughts are turning increasingly towards a more meaningful questioning of life. Like Thoreau, times of meditation, prayer and solitude are also important to me. How does faith tie in? I believe that faith gives us a purpose to work towards in our lives and it continues to help us even when our purpose seems difficult or unattainable. For me, my purpose has given me a dream which is much bigger than I think I can actually do. And so, I rely on my faith to remind myself that God never gives us a dream that is too big. With faith, I know that God also gives me a way to make the dream happen.

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My second 'F' is for Family: The all-important family, the backbone of any society. Sociologists tell us that family is the primal human community. That the family is not a mere luxury – it is a necessity. It is based on need. The key component to any family is to know that even when we experience differences, we can (*well, nearly always*) rely on them to be there for us – loving, caring and encouraging. My own family is scattered overseas, interstate, and for those living closer at the time of writing, restricted by the present 'lockdown!' This does not, however, prevent us from being in regular, loving contact. When we are able to be in contact with one another, magically it seems as if no time has passed at all. We just pick up from the where we last caught up. Sadly, not all families are so fortunate.

I believe that this is the beauty and strength of being family – that there is a connection which ignores time or space and unites us forever. A lovely quote on family by an unknown author sums it up for me – 'Family is like branches on a tree, we all grow in different directions, yet our roots remain as one'.

My third 'F' is for Friends: As the old adage goes, we are free to *choose our friends, not our family* – the personal and positive nature of friendship is our choice. Being social creatures, we need that sense of 'belonging,' of feeling appreciated by those for whom we care. Meaningful friendships are priceless. Over the years, many of my friends have been and still are an important part of my life; they have helped me become the person I am today. As close friends, we have shared each other's experiences and to a certain degree, we have inhabited each other's lives.

Friends often share similar viewpoints and values but they don't always necessarily agree! They are witnesses to the milestones and unexpected changes in our lives. Certainly, there are different levels of friendship, and all are important. I am talking here about the friends that are there for us through 'thick and thin' as well as the 'fun' times. Those to whom we know we can turn when desperately in need of a shoulder to cry on. These are some of the feelings and experiences I have shared with friends during the good and sad times and are part of my most cherished memories.

I thank God for the most blessed and important three 'F's in my life – my faith, my family and my friends.

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